

BETTY
MUSGRAVE



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BY

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NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

681 FIFTH AVENUE

1913

"What is good for a bootless bene?"

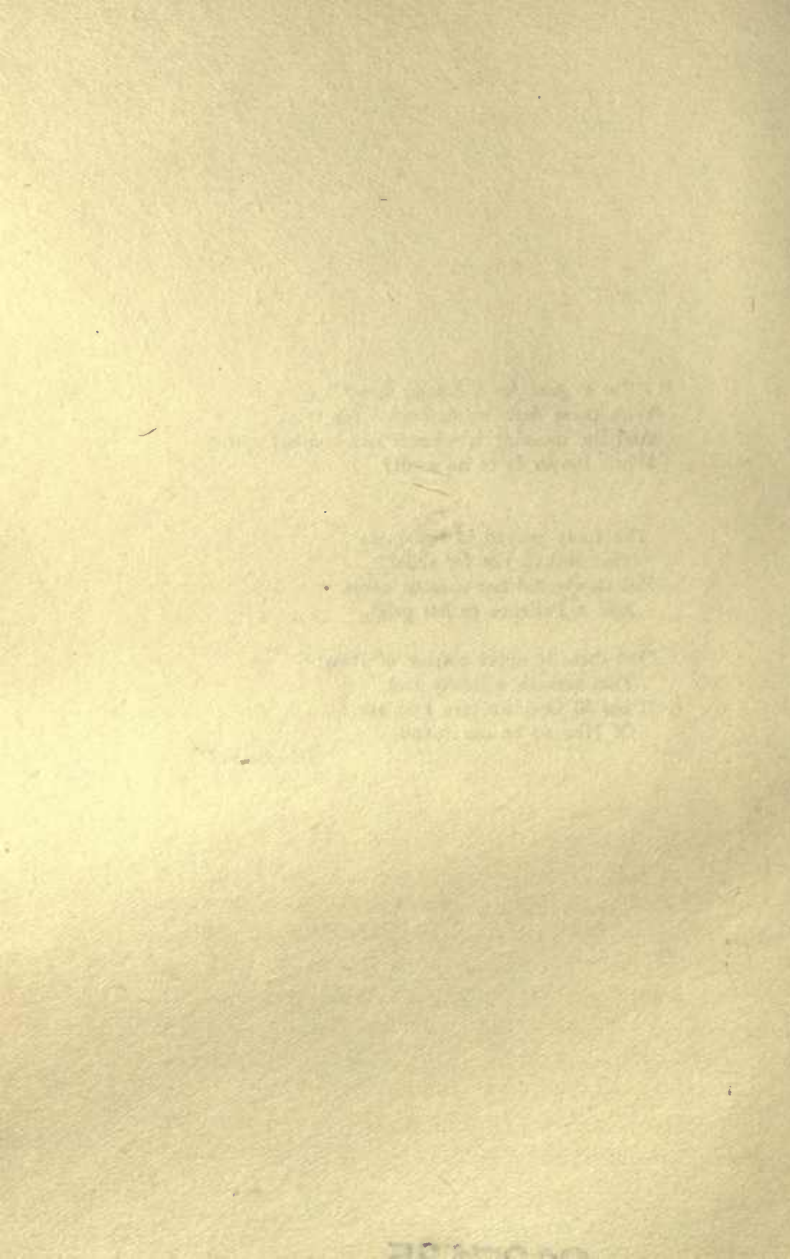
With these dark words begins my tale;
And the meaning is whence can comfort spring
When Prayer is of no avail?

.

The Lady prayed in heaviness
That looked not for relief!
But slowly did her succour come
And a Patience to her grief.

Oh! there is never sorrow of Heart
That lacketh a timely end,
If but to God we turn and ask
Of Him to be our friend.

Wordsworth



BETTY MUSGRAVE

CHAPTER I

BESIDE a clear stream "that glides the dark hills under"—not the Yarrow of the poet's choice, but a little unnamed river, known only to those who had heard its song since childhood,—there stood the ruin of an old Border fortress: scarred by fire and storms, roofless now, and long untenanted, it looked down grimly on the valley below. From the steep knoll on which the tower stood, the winding road that ran along the valley could be seen for a long way; while, close at hand, not more than a quarter of a mile from the old ruin, was the small, comparatively modern house, to which, in later times, the last branch of the family had hived off.

This was a cheerful, home-like place, always kept very spruce about the doors, for old Miss Musgrave kept a sharp eye upon everything, allowing no slackened fences or uncut grass about her establishment. Her brother, the owner, was in India, with no money to spare, and therefore only too glad that she should live in the house, and keep the place in order. It had been her home since childhood, and the old lady could

have imagined no other. There she lived a rigorous, contented life, going seldom from home, seeing few people, her whole interest centred in her little niece Betty, Captain Musgrave's only child, who had been sent home from India to be under her care.

The child was not in the least afraid of her aunt. She knew that the old lady's rigid demeanour was armour above a very soft heart. She might, indeed, have been passionately attached to her, if her whole romantic childish affections had not been given to the mother in India. It is true that Betty's remembrance of her mother was very confused. Her scattered memories all put together did not amount to much . . . she remembered her mother's pretty dresses, her quick, sweet kisses, and the tender names that she used to call her by—names such as her aunt never used. Then the last vision of her waving good-bye—the white veil half-pushed up from the beautiful rosy face. That was mother; an aunt was just an aunt. Thinking of these things, Betty felt much like an ardent Jacobite toasting "The king over the water," living meanwhile in peace and plenty under the safe Hanoverian rule.

She led a life as happy and well regulated as a child's life could be. She had no companions of her own age, but did not know the want of them. Miss Musgrave's system was an admirable mixture of kindness and discipline. The child was never idle or discontented; her little world

moved round daily with the same cheerful regularity. On fine days she used to play about by the old tower—a choice place for childish games. “Houses” might be built so easily from the heaps of round loose stones that lay on the grass. It was interesting, too, to venture inside the grey walls, and stand looking up, “miles and miles,” as she said, to where a breadth of blue shone between the huge scarred beams of the old roof. Betty would put her hands to her mouth, and whoop with all her might, till the frightened birds darted from the crevices to fly in circles overhead.

Then out in the sunshine she could slide up and down on the slippery grass that covered the steep sides of the knoll, or, tired of that, in a brief fit of quiet virtue, would sit making daisy chains, while nurse sang to her. Nurse had a sweet voice; “Lucy’s Flitting” was a favourite ditty, rendered sometimes with such sentimental effect that Betty would burst into tears.

The great bright event of the child’s future was her mother’s return—possible always, yet always postponed. To that she looked forward with the unreasoning “patience of hope” that only children know. Every morning, as she wakened, it was, “She may come to-day”; and every time that her aunt got a letter Betty asked “if it was from India saying that mother was coming home?”

On the knoll by the tower the child had established a point of outlook for herself; there

she could see the road go winding up the valley. Some day, she felt sure (for she paid little heed to her aunt's exact calculations as to the date of her parents' return)—some day—to-day—to-morrow perhaps—she, standing looking down, would see a carriage driving up the road: in it a beautiful lady in a white veil—then, how she would fling herself down the hill, and rush through the stable-yard, and fly along to the front door to meet her mother! She thought that the arrival under any other circumstances would be deprived of half its interest.

One day—an April day with bright gleams of sunshine—Betty was playing as usual in her favourite spot. Nurse, who was disinclined to talk, sat sewing at a little distance. Betty's "house" had just tumbled down, and she was too hot at the moment to begin another, so she mounted on the biggest heap of loose stones—the one she called her "watch-tower"—and began in recitative to herself, "*A carriage—a carriage—will come driving slowly up the road,*" when all of a sudden her heart gave a leap, for there it was—a hired carriage, too. Betty, who was well acquainted with every native horse and vehicle for miles around, detected that in an instant. She strained her eyes to see, but as yet the distance was too great for her to make out who the occupants were. A few seconds, and then she distinctly saw a lady's bonnet. That was quite enough for her. "Nannie, Nannie," she cried; "there's a carriage!—there's a lady in it!

It's coming up to the house! It's coming; it's coming! Oh, be quick—let us run—it may be my dear mother!”

She pulled a handful of nurse's skirt from the gathers as she spoke, received a slap, and, without waiting for permission, started off as fast as her legs could carry her. She slid down the side of the knoll, scrambled over the fence, and ran to the house. When she got to the door the carriage was standing there empty. Betty rushed into the drawing-room, panting. A lady sat talking to her aunt. In her excitement Betty took no notice of a little boy who stood by the lady's chair. “Oh, aunt, is it my mother?” she called, breathless.

“No, Elizabeth,” said Miss Musgrave, not pleased by this abrupt entrance. “This is not your mother. This is Mrs Wentworth, a friend of your father's. Shake hands at once; don't cry. Take your pinafore out of your mouth, and stand up straight.”

It was a black moment for Betty. A sob mounted in her throat, and she stood stock still in the middle of the room. Then, attracted by the strange lady's sweet, low voice and white hand, she came close up to her, and allowed herself to be kissed. The boy, who stood beside Mrs Wentworth, stared hard at Betty with his round eyes; evidently he was disappointed that she had not been naughty.

“This is Oliver Lacy,” said Miss Musgrave; “and now you may run away and play out-of-

doors." Betty pulled the boy by the hand, and so they went out together.

"Where is your mother?" was Betty's first question.

"In England; we live there," said the boy.

"Mine is in India," said Betty. "But she's soon coming home, and then I shall live with her always. She's lovely. What's yours like?"

Oliver considered for a moment before he replied. "Like something bought in a shop—very expensive, of course," he added.

"Oh!" said Betty. "Do you love her?"

He paused again before he answered. "I suppose so." He looked about him. "This is not a very big house. What's that?"—he pointed to the ruin on the height.

"That is where we used to live—a long time ago—before aunt remembers even," said Betty. "We came down here because it was more comfortable."

"I should think so. It's no roof, and scarcely any windows. Our house at St Julliets is *very* large"—he turned with a magnificent air. "We are people of great consequence in the neighbourhood."

"You don't look it," said Betty; "you're so white and fat."

"I have been very seriously ill," said Oliver, with importance. Until that moment he had forgotten the fact. He thought poorly of the scenery. "We have trees at St Julliets, and the river laughs," he said, looking about him, as they

climbed the bare grassy slope. "But," he added, as they came near the ruin, "I think that there must be interesting things here."

"What?" asked Betty, attracted by a gleam in his eye.

Oliver threw back his head and gazed up, then turned and looked all about him. "Oh—gnomes," he said, a dimple appearing in the round, pale cheek.

"What's that?"

"Living things—not quite like us—fairies," he explained. "They come out *there*"—he threw his hand towards the ruin—"and dance!" . . . Betty stood entranced, and a tale flowed on. She started at last when she heard nurse calling to her to come back to the house. Mrs Wentworth was going away. Betty parted from the boy with reluctance. Before they left, however, she had heard her aunt say something to Mrs Wentworth which gave her a great deal to think about.

"I fear, from the letter that I had last week, that the illness is very serious," Miss Musgrave had said. Betty did not hear the next sentence. Then Mrs Wentworth said something about "Camilla."

"Camilla will come home," said Miss Musgrave. "I do not think that we could live together," she added. Betty listened, astonished. Camilla was her mother's name.

"Who is ill, aunt? is it mother?" the child asked that evening, after their visitors had gone.

Miss Musgrave drew her on to her knee. Her grave face quivered as she spoke. "No, Betty. Your father is ill."

"Then will mother not come home?" asked Betty, despairingly. She had seen little of her father, who came far behind in her regard.

"Yes ; I think she will," said Miss Musgrave, and Betty looked up, scared, into her sad, tearless eyes.

She came into the nursery an hour later, as her custom was, to hear Betty say her prayers.

Out-of-doors the long twilight had just begun to fade ; inside the house was very still. From the green slopes, where the sheep were feeding, the young lambs cried their shrill, vibrating cry :

"Jesus, tender Shepherd, hear me,
Bless Thy little lamb to-night,"

whispered the child, as she rolled her heavy head against her aunt's stiff skirts.

"Through the darkness be Thou near me,"

prompted Miss Musgrave, who sat bolt upright on a wooden chair. Betty mumbled the words.

"Keep me safe till morning light."

"Morning light," murmured Betty, almost inaudibly.

"Bless father," Miss Musgrave went on. A little snore was the only response ; but Miss Musgrave belonged to the firm school of old Scottish ladies (now, alas ! no more) who believed that even babes could learn their duty. She

placed a finger gently under Betty's chin, raising her heavy head. "Now, Betty. Bless father—"

The child opened her eyes—blue eyes—wide at this, and made an effort to remember the whole. "Bless father *and* mother; make Betty a good girl—and send mother home soon." The last clause of the petition she had added untaught.

The old lady, who, during her lifetime, had prayed so many apparently unanswered prayers, stood for a minute or two looking down at the child after she had been put to bed; then she folded her lips, and sighed, as she walked out of the room with her measured, soldierly tread.

CHAPTER II

BETTY MUSGRAVE'S father had married for love; about the same time a young friend of his, Oliver Lacy by name, had married for money. Being poor and proud, disappointed in love, fond of his ease, and seeing no prospect of advancement in his service, he, having a pleasant presence and a winning tongue, married the richest woman he knew—a relation of his own—heiress of the Lacys of St Julllots. He died when Oliver, his son, was about eight years old, leaving his widow in full possession of the boy and the estates. There had been some desultory correspondence between him and Captain Musgrave, as younger men; but afterwards life drifted them far apart, and latterly their only tie of connection had been the fact that Mrs Wentworth, a cousin of the Musgraves, happened to be the wife of the rector of St Julllots.

In appearance the little Oliver resembled his mother. At eight years old he was a fair, fat child, with an expression of much innocence, slightly contradicted by his extremely alert, humorous eyes. Mrs Lacy was pleased to suppose that he inherited all her family characteristics. A hen, however (I suppose the opportunity), might hatch a falcon's egg, and we

may sometimes in family life observe relationships that appear almost as strange. Deep in Oliver's nature there lurked a strain of temperament which certainly did not belong to the Lacys.

"Hush, mamma! There's a *bird* talking," he exclaimed once, when a nightingale began to sing while Mrs Lacy was telling him some childish story, vapid as all her stories were, in which she supposed him to be interested.

He had once told her that he had had wonderful dreams of "golden rice and angels and roses"; but, as she instructed the nurse to give him a dose of medicine in consequence, he kept his visions to himself in future. None the less, his mother's gentle, stifling control was over him day and night. She hung above him, as it were, every moment; he could scarcely breathe unnoticed. She arranged his games, she chose his little companions, she selected his story books—always those he did not enjoy—she decided what he was to like, and what he was not to like. She settled exactly what he ought to feel and say upon every occasion, till the child learnt, without actually telling lies, to evade some of this suffocating tenderness even at an early age. Often when he was supposed to be reading some pretty story of his mother's choosing, where sentimental children did what grown-up people supposed that children would do—all told in the language of the most studied simplicity—Oliver would, in reality, be sitting in the library (Mrs Lacy could never stay long in a library) gorging

himself on "Don Quixote" or "Gulliver's Travels." Had it not been for Mrs Wentworth, the rector's wife, the boy would have been hopelessly spoilt. She, a childless woman, was beloved by every child that came near her, and she took an especial interest in Oliver. They were very near neighbours, as the Rectory was only half-a-mile away from St Julliets. Whenever Oliver could escape from his mother's care for a little, he turned up at the Rectory; as a small child peering into everything, or trotting contentedly after Mrs Wentworth through the house. He took measles when he was first sent to school, and, of course, Mrs Lacy insisted on his being sent home, that she might tend him herself. The illness proved not very severe, but the boy's convalescence was indefinitely protracted by her over-anxiety.

It happened that Mrs Wentworth was going to Scotland at the time, and she begged Mrs Lacy to allow Oliver to come with her. He arrived in the North like a little, fat, white slug, all his nerves on edge, petted so that he screamed and stamped at the slightest contradiction, and pampered on invalid dainties until the most delicate fare had ceased to tempt him; after a fortnight he ran about out-of-doors from morning to night, climbed trees like a squirrel, and beamed with good humour. These were the happiest weeks of his childhood, for the new, strange sense of freedom developed a sense of honour. He tried to do what Mrs Wentworth wished, because she

sometimes allowed him to do as he liked with himself.

It was on their way home, at the end of these happy weeks, that Mrs Wentworth had taken Oliver to the Musgraves. In a few days all recollection of Betty had faded from the child's mind ; but he remembered for long afterwards the austere landscape, so different from the flowery English meadows at St Julliets, and the grim ruin, with its rafters standing black against the blue sky.

The following years developed the fat, white boy, who had roused Betty's contempt, into a fair-haired plump schoolboy, with a tightly shut mouth, and an expression of great good humour. So, by stages of growth not interesting to the reader, Oliver Lacy was transformed into a young man ; very well grown, still inclined to stoutness, not particularly good-looking, but blessed with a wonderfully genial, pleasing manner, and the same luminous, humorous eyes.

As the young man grew up, Mrs Lacy did not inquire too closely into his pursuits ; that they were not vicious she knew. She was under the impression that a perfect sympathy existed between them. Having watched his every breath, almost from his birth, hung above his cradle with an oppressive gentleness, with a scarcely less oppressive morality instructed his boyhood, she now rested in the belief that his will had been moulded exactly to hers. "I perfectly understand Oliver," she would say—a statement, the humour of which

never palled upon her son. She certainly did look askance on some of his friends. Oliver had a great many; as a boy he had distributed the most ardent admiration freely, then became somehow gradually aware that from the admirer he had become the admired; that Smith or Jones, whom he used to worship, were now listening, ready to laugh at his jokes; that Robinson, who at one time was the rising star on his horizon, was now anxious to have his, Oliver's, opinion on the very subjects that they used to discuss. Oliver was not always talkative, only sometimes, as the night went on, and the talk about him had roused him up, he could not but notice how a space was cleared for him, as it were, how the table grew silent; and then it seemed so easy just to say—oh! a thousand and one things that the great, merry, rich pageant of the world must surely be showing to everyone: there must have merely been something in his way of saying it that tickled their fancy—that was all.

For a time he plunged rather too deeply in study to please Mrs Lacy, who abhorred old clothes, and had no intention that her son should be a scholar; her aim was always to repress every sign of the unusual. "Is he writing poetry, I wonder?" she said to Mrs Wentworth, when Oliver had appeared for some time to be not in his usual spirits. This was a great dread of hers. "Of course, it's a delightful thing for a man in Oliver's position (a favourite phrase) to be able at any time to write cultivated verses; but, of

course, *nothing* could be more undesirable than that he should take to it seriously."

Mrs Wentworth smiled. She had a white, wise old face, that crinkled deeply when she was amused, and a very clear, low voice, with a precise way of speaking.

"Oliver has never taken anything seriously yet," she answered. "It will surprise himself when he does."

"He has so many duties," said his mother.

"So many interests," replied Mrs Wentworth, to whom Oliver's large outlook on life afforded perpetual amusement.

"He is like a stream that has overflowed its channel, Samuel," she said to her husband. "A wide expanse that glitters, but is very shallow; it would be the saving of him to be gathered between banks, and run to an end."

CHAPTER III

IT seemed unlikely that any circumstance would arise to give the direction that Mrs Wentworth desired to Oliver's energy.

With her ideas about "position," by the time that he came of age Mrs Lacy had created for her son a position of the most deathly dulness that could well have been imagined. She had never even allowed him to think of entering any profession. The whole of her fortune being absolutely her own, Oliver was in that respect quite dependent upon her, a fact which as a boy he could not, and as a young man did not, wish to acknowledge. His position was in truth no very great thing, belonging as he did to a family undistinguished by any special greatness in the past, without brilliant connections, and of purely local fame. There was little to help him: another influence in childhood; a different position in life; a direction for his energies; someone, even, who at his side would "ever hold the target higher," might have made great things out of him, it seemed. There is surely more of the soul's wealth lost in stupid prosperity than ever was drowned in the gulfs of sorrow. Oh, rich man, up, and try to win the kingdom of heaven! It is hard for all of us, but harder far for you!

Mrs Lacy had no idea that she had not done the best for Oliver. She was a woman who never neglected a trifling duty—the smaller it was the better she liked to do it, nor could she ever have believed that she had neglected a more important one. Propriety edged her in as with high walls—the suitable, the seemingly were her only rules of conduct. "She drowns you in cream; she stifles you under feather beds," Oliver used to say when he got provoked with her; but, on the whole, they got on together well enough, simply because no sufficient cause of dispute had as yet arisen between them.

Mrs Lacy, of course, was much concerned about Oliver's marriage, and frequently reminded him that it was his duty to marry; still, she did not appear so feverishly anxious to welcome a daughter-in-law as to be unable to find fault, often with perfect justice, with most of the girls he met. Oliver himself declared that he had been in love so much and so often that he had had no time to make up his mind. None of these brief affairs, it seemed, had left any serious impression. At one time he had been greatly taken with a girl, whose connections even his mother would have approved of. But Kathleen Rorke, as she grew up (Oliver's acquaintance with her had been when she was a mere schoolgirl), had become quite a favourite of Mrs Lacy's; and, in consequence, he never wanted to see her again.

There came a day at last, unmarked in Mrs

Lacy's calendar, when the stir of change began in their accustomed life.

It was late in October ; Oliver had been in Scotland for a month, and his mother expected him to come home the next day. She sat in the gathering dusk thinking about him, for in her own way she missed him a good deal when he was away from her. In his last letter, too, he had spoken with more than his usual enthusiasm about some girl whom he had met lately ; and so Mrs Lacy, on that particular evening, had been roused to consider afresh the oft-considered subject of his marriage. "Well, it must come some day," she thought ; "there is nobody that I would like so well as Kathleen Rorke, but I trust, at anyrate, that it will be someone with nice connections."

* * * * *

In Scotland that evening, while Mrs Lacy sat meditating upon Oliver's marriage, the night was wild and damp, gathering slowly to a storm. The twilight fell with a supreme melancholy upon the bare hills, on the narrow valley, at the mouth of which stood the old tower where Betty Musgrave had been playing that day, so many years before, when Oliver had arrived with Mrs Wentworth.

The old building was still standing, although the walls here and there were broken in great gaps, and heaps of loose stones were rising through the tall nettles that grew inside of it. Down below the knoll, sheltered by the low wood of stunted oak trees, the newer house showed white in the gathering dusk.

At the back entrance, two or three small black cattle stood shoulder to shoulder beside the gate, for it was past the hour when the Herd usually came to drive them in, and no one had called them yet. As the beasts stood there waiting, a beggar woman—"a going body," as the Scots phrase is—came hirpling up the road. The Herd by this time had appeared, and she advanced to the gate, and would have entered, but he stopped her with uplifted hand.

"No need to ask for aught in there the night," he said, solemnly. "The end's come; they're a' sowd up; the leddies is awa' the night—the machine'll be at the door in five minutes that'll tak them til the station, I tell ye."

"Hech, hech! she'll be naun the waur o' auld Kate's blessin'—let me through, man! let me through!"

The Herd grudgingly held the gate half-open, and she and her bundle sidled through.

"Blessin'!" he echoed. "Ye'll maybe get a saxpence oot o' the young leddy yet—if ye're quick!" he bawled after her. She grinned a toothless grin at him, and hobbled on, passed up the long winding path, and then cut across the field towards the front of the house.

The place, which in old Miss Musgrave's time had been so trig and homelike, was now all changed. The lawns were mossy; the ground green with weeds; the creepers hung neglected from the walls, and the shrubs were broken and unpruned.

The hall door stood wide open. The passage within was all littered with ropes and straw, and there was a pile of boxes on the doorstep.

The old woman crept close up to the door, and stood waiting. A voice within the house called out, "There's the carriage, Pomfret! Tell Mrs Musgrave"; and presently the sound of wheels was heard in the avenue.

A door slammed; someone hurried across the hall; then a hired carriage drove up to the front of the house, and the Herd came round, and began to pile the boxes on to the carriage roof.

At last a lady came out of the house, followed by a maid. They got into the carriage, and the driver called out, "Ye'll need yer time—we're late, miss." A girl appeared at the door; she was weeping bitterly. As she came down the steps, the beggar woman stepped forward with a whine. "Ye're off at last, Miss Betty."

The girl dropped a bit of silver into her outstretched hand. "Good-bye then, Kate—that's the last you'll get from me," she said, as she stepped into the carriage and they drove away.

The Herd, who had been lifting up the boxes, waited until the sound of wheels died in the distance, then he went back again into the empty house.

He shuttered up the front windows, came out again, clearing away the straw from the step, shut the door behind him, locked it, and took the key.

Then he joined the beggar wife, and in silence

they trudged down the damp avenue strewn with the pale leaves of late autumn. At the gate the man turned to look back at the dark house: no lights shone from the windows; no smoke rose from the chimneys.

"A hundred years an' more," he said, "since yon hoose's been empty! It's well Miss Musgrave's in her grave afore this."

"Mrs Musgrave's a braw leddy, man," said the woman, grinning.

He turned, and spat on the ground expressively as he spoke. "She! the auld —— she's run through the whole o' the siller, an' there's the young leddy that's worth the lot o' them, awa' noo withoot a roof to cover her."

"Bless her bonnie face! But there's *men* in the warrld," mumbled the old woman, as she hitched her bundle higher, and took the nearest road to the public-house, grasping Betty Musgrave's shilling.

CHAPTER IV

"*ONCE in Delos, by the altar of Apollo, I saw a sight as goodly—a young Palm-tree growing.*" Oliver Lacy muttered the words to himself, and turned on his heel quickly, to walk up the whole length of the long platform, before he again faced round to look at the young woman who had so roused his admiration.

The station was crowded by the arrival of an incoming train; only a moment before Oliver had been looking about him with amusement, noticing every one. Now the stout men in overcoats; the women with children in their arms; the rotund, elderly females, in bugled mantles, who had long ago lost every charm save self-respect; dapper young men; hurrying officials—all, who a few seconds before had been so distinct to the eye, were melted into the background for a single figure. Oliver could scarcely help exclaiming aloud in his delight as he looked at her. She was more than commonly tall, with so beautiful a shape that it was only after a second glance that any man could look at her face, for every movement she made surprised you like a new, sweet note in music. She made her way through the throng of people, bending her body slightly as she went—as a tree sways

with a light wind—and all the other women looked like dolls beside a statue. Her eyes were fixed on vacancy, as if she scarcely saw where she was going. Her dress was dark, and very plainly made, and she wore her hat crammed down on her forehead as if to hide her face; but, as he passed her again, Oliver saw that it was marked with tears. "You adorable, beautiful creature," he thought, "I'll have something to say to the man who has made you cry!" But no man appeared. Oliver watched her go up to a pile of luggage at the end of the platform, where presently she was joined by an older lady, whose face was covered by a thick veil, and a decent-looking elderly woman, apparently a maid.

As he sauntered past them, Oliver noticed with surprise that the maid too was crying. She stood talking earnestly, with a good deal of emphasis, wiping her eyes from time to time. At last the London express ran into the station. Alas for Oliver! he was not going to London. Standing discreetly in the background, he watched the girl fling her arms about the maid's neck and kiss her, weeping; then catch hold of her companion's arm, and help her into the train. As it glided past him, Oliver caught another glimpse of the beautiful face at the window. He had still to wait for a few minutes before his train came in; and observing the maid who had accompanied the two ladies still standing by the bench, he strolled up and sat down beside her. She was presently joined by a man-

servant, who accosted her with an air of civil sympathy.

"Very hard on your young lady, Mrs Pomfret—all sold up, I understand?"

Mrs Pomfret wiped her eyes. "*Everything*," she said, with emphasis. "Not so much as a chair or a table left to them. What *she's* to do in London, I don't know—and miss, who's never been used, as I may say, to button her own boots!—it's a sad affair."

"Indeed it is," assented the man, profoundly, adding: "Them old families is all decayed away."

"It'll be a long time, Mr Bude, before *some* families come that length," she retorted.

"True, true," assented the young man. "My mistress, now—let her put on all she's got, and more—she'll never look like Miss Musgrave in her oldest gown."

"Miss Musgrave's a lady born, and you'll never add to that, nor take from it," said the maid.

"Where may they be goin' to—relatives?" inquired the man.

"They're to lodge with my sister-in-law," replied Mrs Pomfret, in rather a hurried manner, "and probably make visits."

"*She's* not likely to stay long anywhere," the man began; but here, as his train came up, Oliver had to move away.

"Musgrave—Musgrave?"—how did he know the name?—it was in connection with Mrs Went-

worth, he remembered. He leant back in his seat, and dreamed about the beautiful face, that seemed to hang between him and the landscape, as if it had been painted on the glass of the carriage window.

CHAPTER V

THE express swung on through the night.

Betty Musgrave, having wrapped up her mother in shawls and rugs, making her as comfortable as she could, lay back in her own corner of the carriage, closing her eyes, but not to sleep.

Every distressful feeling that had torn her heart in leaving her old home came back to her again ; one by one, vivid and unforgettable, a series of memories rose up before her. Then she opened her eyes, and looked across at her mother.

Mrs Musgrave was a middle-aged woman, with aquiline features and a high colour, who might still have been called decidedly handsome. But, as she lay there asleep, an acute observer would have noticed a certain coarseness creeping like a veil over the originally pleasing features, deepening the lines that indicate sensuality and sloth, and changing the character of the face. As yet, the change was not very marked. The woman was like some luscious fruit just beginning to pass into decay ; a few years more, and then all delicacy of outline, all energy of expression, would have vanished from her face, and the sin that had killed them alone look out of the windows.

Betty turned away her eyes, after one look ;

then, as her mother stirred in her sleep, and shivered, the girl softly covered her with her own rug, and, sitting bolt upright, she rubbed a clear space on the glass, and tried to look out into the night.

The moon shone through fog; now and then, as they swept past a house or a village, the lights twinkled like low-hanging stars, or she saw the bulk of a farm-steading, or a group of trees dark against the dim sky.

Betty began to think then about the dead vacancy of the house that she had left; her last sight of it,—like the last look at the face of the dead—when we wish we had not looked again.

Ah! her happy, sheltered childhood. How could she have lived such merry thoughtless years with a shadow like this hanging above her! She remembered how faintly the news of her father's death had affected her, and her joy in preparation for going along with her aunt to meet her mother at Southampton. Betty had not been allowed to go down to the dock; she had waited with Pomfret in the hotel. She remembered how her heart beat when the door at last opened and her aunt came in, how she ran to her mother, and then her terror at the sudden outburst of hysterical grief that followed. Old Miss Musgrave stood by, pale and severe, until the young widow, recovering herself, suddenly sat up, and, with a glance at the mirror, began to rearrange her hair. Betty, child though she was, noticed the expres-

sion on her aunt's lips, as Mrs Musgrave turned to get a better view of herself in the glass. Then followed a few days in town, and after that Betty, to her own bitter disappointment, was obliged to go home with her aunt, leaving Mrs Musgrave in the South — her health could not stand a Scottish winter, she said. She came back in summer, and then Betty had been sent away to school. When she came home for the holidays her mother was away paying a visit somewhere, and her aunt looked strangely failed and worn. Betty would have liked to stay with her then, for she knew that she was changed, and needed care herself instead of caring for others, as she had done all her days. However, the old lady would not hear of that. In the autumn Betty was sent abroad — to school in France. Then came the news of her aunt's death. Betty grieved bitterly; but, even then, the thought of living always with "her own mother," as she called Mrs Musgrave, was a consolation. She had seen so little of her as yet, — now, however, she might stay at home; they would be always together, and she could love her to her heart's content.

At first, of course, when she returned it was sad not to find her aunt there to welcome her; still, for a little while, Betty hardly realised what she had lost. Then, every hour of the day, in every detail of her life, she began to miss the careful control that had been around her since her childhood. Mrs Musgrave had lavish ideas

of expenditure. Everything in the household was on a much more luxurious scale than had ever been the case before. The old servants, with one or two exceptions, left, and were replaced by a larger staff of new ones, who never stayed for long.

In spite of this the whole place, by degrees, assumed a look of neglect. Betty was only eighteen then; she had scarcely begun to confess even to herself the truth, which, no more at first than a sort of haunting shadow, now began to take to itself an awful and definite form. The first knowledge of it came creeping into the girl's life like some corrupt, evil thing in a dream, ever at her side.

A sense began to penetrate her that their relations with their neighbours were not the same as during her aunt's lifetime. People came seldom to the house—made excuses when invited; old friends looked at her in a pitying way, and she was rarely asked to their houses.

Mrs Musgrave's behaviour at times became strange and irritable. She would sit silent for hours, and then burst into unexplained weeping. Betty at first used to suppose that it was grief, and would try to comfort her. Then she began to take "attacks," when she shut herself up in her own room, and Pomfret attended to her with pursed lips, not permitting Betty to go near her. "She's better left very quiet, miss," the maid would say entreatingly, if Betty came to the door.

They saw few of the people who had been on such friendly terms with the old lady. "Your aunt had a limited mind, Betty. She was quite contented with these dull country people, but I cannot endure them," said Mrs Musgrave. So Betty saw very little of the old friends. Her mother found some acquaintances more to her mind—"new people," who are always apt to be looked upon rather askance in a country neighbourhood unless their antecedents are well known. Mrs Musgrave, sharing none of these prejudices, extended an eager welcome to any chance newcomer. One of these people Betty especially disliked. He was an elderly man, a bachelor—Mr Smythe by name—who seemed to have had some previous acquaintance with her mother in India; many were their mutual reminiscences when they met. He had taken a lease of a house some miles away, and Betty could not avoid him, as he came constantly to the house; his bright, blue eyes, his white beard and ready smile were hateful to her, she could not say why.

He certainly made himself very agreeable. The servants said that he came "courtin' the mistress"; and Mrs Musgrave, though not a coquettish woman, had something of the same impression. Betty never thought of such a thing; but she instinctively disliked the man from the very first.

Now, as she sat in the train, there came to her mind most vividly the recollection of the first day that she had realised the truth about her mother.

They were going to some house in the neighbourhood, where Betty knew that they would be sure to meet Mr Smythe. She tried to make excuses, but her mother would not listen to them. They had a long way to drive. Betty remembered how handsome her mother had looked as she entered the room, which was full of people, all talking and laughing; the talk died suddenly on their entrance.

Mr Smythe was there, of course; but the girl managed to avoid him. She had gone out with some other young people to the garden, leaving her mother in the house, and was surprised, when she returned after a short time, to find their dogcart waiting at the door. Mrs Musgrave was standing there. "Ah, here you are, Betty! I've been looking for you—come—we are going—we are going home," she said. Her face was flushed in scarlet patches, and her teeth set hard. She mounted the high dogcart with difficulty.

Mr Smythe, who had been standing beside her on the doorstep when Betty came up, now moved forward, making a pretence of settling the rug over the girl's knee.

"Mustn't let your mother drive to-night," he whispered; "she's not fit for it."

"What do you mean?" Betty asked, sharply.

"Hush—hush—nothing—good-bye," he called, as Mrs Musgrave gathered up the reins.

Betty saw the look with which he met the eyes of the other men at the door as they drove away. It was not unkind—full of pity for her—

self; but it was the first time that she had guessed the truth, and she never forgot it, or forgave the man.

They drove on rapidly. "Don't whip her up, mother—don't—don't," said the girl, laying her hand on her mother's for an instant, for, as they began to descend the steep hill, she had urged the mare into a gallop.

"Hold your tongue. Do you think I don't know how to drive," said Mrs Musgrave, whipping up the beast and driving faster. The roads were slimy from recent rains, and down they went at a pace that made Betty cling to the rail of the cart. Suddenly she saw on the road in front of them the figure of their old coachman, Horne. Hearing the noise of wheels he looked round, and stopped by the roadside.

"Here is Horne; shall we take him up, mother?" gasped the girl; but just at that moment the mare slid forward, slipped, and fell. The old man was with them in a moment. He raised the beast, all trembling, and splashed with foam, patting her and coaxing her as he looked at her poor knees. Then he took the reins from Mrs Musgrave's hand. She had fallen half-across the seat, with her hat all awry and her hair disordered, gasping out incoherent words.

The old man lifted his clean-shaven, stern face, with the long upper lip set. "If ye've no pity for the beast, nor shame for yourself, wumman, hev pity on yer daughter, and no let a'boddy see ye like this." He turned to Betty, "She canna

walk, Miss Betty; sit still, an' I'll lead the mare home."

He walked slowly at the beast's head, and Betty put her arms around her mother to keep her from falling off the seat. She appeared to be sunk in a sort of stupor. By the time they reached the house she allowed Pomfret and Betty to help her upstairs without a word.

Late that evening, when Pomfret came into the girl's room she found her still crouched in a chair, with her face hidden. The maid came up to her softly. "Miss Betty," she said, "are you ill?" Betty raised a pale, tearless face, to which grief had lent a sudden severity, that made the delicate, girlish features resemble old Miss Musgrave's, stern and sorrow-worn as they used to be.

"No," she said; "I am not ill. What do you want?"

The woman hesitated. "Mrs Musgrave is very bad," she said at last. "Oh, miss, she's real bad by this time. She's been at it for some days, I knew—but now I think we should send for the doctor."

"Doctor!" echoed Betty. She rose suddenly. 'Is it not bad enough to be disgraced before all the servants, Pomfret? No; she sha'n't have any stranger see her like that; we must do what we can by ourselves."

The week that followed was still like a black blot upon the girl's mind. Then came a long period of anxiety and constant, wearing watchfulness. Soon afterwards she began to discover that they had been living far beyond their means. In

vain she tried to unravel the confusion of her mother's money matters. Bills came pouring in—all of sudden, it seemed, and long unpaid—bills for household expenses, for dress, for furniture—debts to the people in the county town—debts in London; it all came like an avalanche. For a few months they struggled on. Betty got her mother to consent to give up the carriage; they dismissed the servants, all except Pomfret and the cook; they sold all their more valuable possessions; but still remained pretty deep in debt. The girl, when she first came back from school, knowing nothing of the real state of her mother's income, had taken the increased luxury of their household as a matter of course; now she found out what mad recklessness it had all been. But even this would have seemed as nothing, had there been no darker shadow behind.

In vain, for a while, she attempted to restrain her mother, feeling as if she fought for dear life with some dreadful, evil thing that she knew in the end must overcome her.

She got a nurse—a hard-eyed woman—who stayed for a few weeks, and then intimated that she could stand it no longer. "Nothing I can do will keep her straight, miss; *she's just a sand-bag for it*," she said. "Get her shut up; it's the only thing will do her any good."

Betty, listening with white lips, paid her her wages, and went to find Pomfret. She caught hold of the woman's hand, and held it tight, and told her what the nurse had said.

"I will take her to London, Pomfret; there, at least, we can be hidden." Then suddenly clinging to her like a child, she sobbed, "Oh, you are the only person that can help me now!"

When at last the end came, and they were obliged to leave the house, Pomfret would fain have come with them. Betty could not afford to take her. As it was, she had got no wages for a year past. She had arranged that her sister-in-law should receive Mrs Musgrave and Betty into her house, and had assured the girl that she would do all that she could to help her. As she bid them good-bye at the station the good woman had looked at Betty, and felt her heart sink. She knew the weight she carried, and remembering her hitherto sheltered life, she trembled for what might happen.

So Betty sat and thought as the train rushed on; it was carrying her into a very dark future. She could see no ray of hope, no star anywhere—and when youth can find no cause for hope, the prospect must be dark indeed. But the girl came of a stringent Scottish race; she drew herself up to face the situation. There was courage in her blood that made her meet misfortune as a desperate man turns to face his foe.

It was a slate-coloured morning, dim with fog, when they got out at King's Cross, and then drove, at funeral pace, till the cab turned down a side street, and stopped at Mrs Pomfret's dreary, respectable house.

CHAPTER VI

THE day that rose in gloom in London was bright and warm, in spite of the lateness of the season, when Oliver arrived at home. He did not forget Betty's face, and the name Musgrave teased him with some half-remembered connection. It had to do with Mrs Wentworth, he was sure, and resolved to ask her about it whenever he had an opportunity.

The very day after his arrival, he went with his mother to the Rectory. The two ladies had been talking in the garden. When they returned to the house, Oliver was standing by the round table that stood in the middle of the quaint white drawing-room. He held a picture in his hand, and was gazing at it with such intentness that he did not even notice their entrance.

"What are you looking at so intently, Oliver?" asked Mrs Wentworth, hobbling up behind him (she was lame, and walked with a stick). She laid her hand on Oliver's arm as she spoke, bending forwards to see what it was.

Oliver started, then held up the photograph. "Who is this? Who is it?" he asked, eagerly.

It was a portrait of the girl he had seen at Carlisle station. In the photograph she wore her hair brushed high and smooth off her forehead,

which was unusually broad and low. The whole beautiful face was given; it was rather round in shape; the eyes seemed to look through and past you—extraordinary eyes they were in so young a face—they might have been those of a sorrowing angel, full, tragic, with the look of a creature that was oppressed by contact with something less pure than itself; yet the lips had all the curves of youth, and seemed made for laughter.

"Who is it?" asked Oliver again.

Mrs Wentworth's kind face worked for a moment, as she replied: "That is Elizabeth Musgrave, my poor cousin, John Musgrave's, only child. I wrote to her the other day, and she sent me that. I have not seen her since she was a little thing; and, by the way, *you* ought to remember that, Oliver, for I took you with me. We drove the whole way; I remember you said to me that you did not like the place afterwards."

"Oh, I remember now! Of course! There was a little girl—and an old tower or something. Is that her, then?"

"Yes," said Mrs Wentworth; "she must be very pretty if she is like that. I have never seen her since, poor child."

"Why 'poor child'?" asked Oliver, turning to her in his quick, smiling way.

Mrs Wentworth looked confused. "Well—ah—she is young still; her father and aunt are dead; and the mother is a peculiar person, I understand. But," she added, afraid of having expressed an

unfavourable opinion, "of course, that may be merely hearsay. I really know nothing of her. I have never seen her. They are in London now, in lodgings; I believe they are badly off. Mrs Musgrave is probably rather extravagant. I mean to go and see them when I am in town next week."

Oliver said nothing more upon the subject. He was very silent as he walked home by his mother's side. It was a brilliant day—"St Luke's little summer," the last sweetness of the year—and a peaceful prospect stretched before them when they crossed the rising ground below the Rectory, and took the shortest way home across the fields. In the great meadows around it, through which a shallow river ran, the house of St Julliot's lay asleep, as it seemed, in an immemorial calm. Wealth and undisturbed possession were written on its old sun-warmed walls; under its roofs the swallows lingered longest; by the banks of its quiet streams the earliest violets were found. A rich, sheltered bit of country, where the great trees, the shallow river running softly, the fatness of the land, gave almost a suggestion of satiety. A place, one might think—when the summer meadows were deep with hay, and silence brooded amongst the profound green woods—where a broken heart could heal again.

On a slightly rising ground across the meadow through which the river ran, stood the Rectory and the church. "Lacy—Lacy—Lacy," the name was written all over the stones in there—on the

very pavement, on the walls. "Something of a crowd at the resurrection," Oliver used to say. It gave Mrs Lacy a sense of her own importance to sit and look at those names; but on Oliver it had quite a different effect. He used to sit in church trying to trace himself back, through mother and grandfather, upwards past the Elizabethan person in the ruff who smirked from the tablet, away to the one who lay so stiff and straight, with his toes pointed outwards, and his cross-handled sword clasped between his hands, the Crusader's emblems carved on the ledge below. Did he remember St Julliot's by the walls of Jerusalem? Or wounded, in the glare of an Eastern day, did his fevered dreams persuade him that he sat again on the bank of the shallow river, and could slake his thirst at will? Oh! queerest of all things—the life continued and the individual lost. Oliver would sit in church sometimes and dream like this, until he felt his own personality thinned away to nothing; then would look up with amazement to realise his mother's very substantial form by his side. Mrs Lacy was always a sight to recall the most flighty imagination in an instant to the actual and the present. A stout woman, comely still, in middle life, when good health and a contented mind have the advantage over the rags of even extreme beauty. She carried herself well, was always richly dressed, suggestive of cream, and velvet, and all things rich and prosperous. It was only when anyone came in contact with her wishes — Mrs Lacy

invariably called her wishes "principles"—that the true force of her character showed itself.

"I don't overcome, I evade, in general," said Oliver. "Fighting with my mother is like trying to turn the course of a stream; it may seem small and quiet in its flow, but there's no end to it—not for one single moment."

He walked by her side that evening as they left the Rectory, thinking in silence. Mrs Lacy rustled on at her usual dignified pace, making an occasional placid remark. She knew nothing of what was going on in Oliver's mind, and, therefore, did not wonder when he said to her that he thought he would go up to town along with Mrs Wentworth on the following week.

CHAPTER VII

"I SCARCELY like to ask you to come and see us; we are living in sordid poverty," wrote Mrs Musgrave, in reply to a note in which Mrs Wentworth had said that she was in town for some days, and would like to come to see them. The note made Mrs Wentworth expect something much worse than the appearance of the house suggested. It looked eminently clean and respectable, she thought; the woman who opened the door to her had evidently been a well-trained servant, and the room into which she was ushered was large and well-furnished.

Betty sat alone by the window, reading. When Mrs Wentworth came in, she stood up, looking a little scared, then came forward quickly, blushing like a rose all over her face. "I suppose that you don't remember me," said Mrs Wentworth, taking the girl by both hands, and looking at her with kind, searching eyes. "The last time I saw you, you were quite a little girl."

"I am very glad to see you—and I remember you quite well," said Betty—she added immediately, "You remind me of my dear aunt." She sat down opposite to Mrs Wentworth, facing the light. The old lady, having had a full share of beauty in her own youth, was kindly disposed

towards all young and pretty creatures ; but when she had taken her first good look at the girl, she remembered that Oliver, the day before, had made her promise to ask him to meet Betty, and she thought about "edged tools."

They talked for some time about old days, about Betty's father, and her aunt ; Mrs Wentworth wondering meanwhile what had given such a sharpness to the girl's manner, and such tragic expression to her eyes. Sometimes it seems as if fate wrote on some faces a foreshadowing of their history. Mrs Wentworth was trying to read that shadow over Betty's brows, when, in the midst of their conversation, Mrs Musgrave came into the room. Welcoming the visitor with effusion, she began at once to complain of their extreme poverty, the discomforts of having to live in lodgings, and so on. "It is not for myself," she said ; "of course, I cannot expect any happiness in this world"—here she wiped her eyes, and threw out her hands with an expressive gesture. "But Betty is young—she ought not to be shut up to an existence of this kind."

"Oh ! I could be quite happy, mother, if"—began the girl, checking herself suddenly. "I do not like living in London—I dislike the noise," she added, as if in explanation.

"Your mother must allow you to come and stay with me at St Julliot's ; if you like the country you would admire it, I'm sure ; but we have a quiet house—perhaps you would be dull."

In answer, Betty smiled a sudden smile, that

showed all her dimples, and changed her face in an instant. "I would never be dull with you I'm sure," she said.

"You will come, then, and see me before I leave town—come on Tuesday," said Mrs Wentworth—then again she remembered her promise to Oliver and her heart misgave her. But, after all, who was she to play at Providence, and why should she be afraid to ask two young people to meet, who would very likely never see each other again.

As she went home, Mrs Wentworth thought about Betty's expression. "The mother looks as if she had a temper, and she talks like one of the foolish women," she said to herself. Still there seemed to be no sufficient reason for the tone in which she had heard Mrs Musgrave spoken of more than once by people—none of whom had known her personally, but had been old friends of her husband's. Mrs Wentworth decided to think that those opinions must have been prejudiced. "It may just be temper and extravagance," she concluded.

Betty, on her part, had enjoyed the first ray of comfort that she had felt since coming to London. Here was an old and tried friend of her dear aunt's, a person in whose kind, calm face she read the same good sense and self-control; here was one person, at least, in whom she could trust. For, after all, the girl had scarcely any friends, none really intimate, of her own age. Her solitary childhood had not been a good

preparation for making friends at school. She had, it is true, kept up a correspondence with two or three of her school companions, but with young people, particularly in early friendships, full confidence is necessary, and that Betty could not give to anyone. She always had to keep something unexpressed, and so, one by one, the ephemeral friendships faded away into a mere annual exchange of letters. She had by nature a singularly simple and confiding disposition, but the effort to bear a secret shame had given her manner a sharpness that at times was almost disagreeable. Her sensitive pride would never allow her to make the first advances to any girl of her own age. She felt that she must always keep something hidden which other people could never understand. She counted up the hours almost until the day came when she could return Mrs Wentworth's visit; hoping that her mother would be "all right" when the day came. Even to herself, Betty never expressed the thing more definitely. Mrs Musgrave had had a fit of economy since they came to town; she would make the girl tramp miles through the mud to save a 'bus fare, and would weep about her debts for hours at a time. But for some days before Mrs Wentworth's visit Betty had noticed signs which she now began to know too well. Her mother, instead of reading or trying to occupy herself in any way, would sit brooding by the fire, with a sullen flush upon her face, answering the girl's remarks like a person only half-awake, then

she would rise and begin to pace restlessly up and down the room, a trembling, nervous excitement in her stride, or fling the window open crying out that she was stifling for a breath of air.

"I can't be bothered with old women," she said to Betty after Mrs Wentworth had gone. "They are all alike in this country, narrow-minded and tiresome. But when one has come down in the world one must submit to be pitied even by the most inferior": she stopped—looked at Betty, and then at her own face in the glass above the mantelshelf. "Ah, Betty—I was once prettier than you—and every man I met was at my feet—and to have to live now in this dull poverty—neglected by the whole world! I wish I had died along with your poor father."

"But, mother, you have got me—we might be so happy together—" began the girl.

Her mother threw back her head, and laughed scornfully. "Happy! living here like mice! better dead," and she buried her face in her hands, as she sat by the fire. Betty's heart sank as she looked at her.

CHAPTER VIII

TUESDAY came; early in the afternoon Betty reminded her mother that they were going to see Mrs Wentworth. She gave a dreamy assent, and after keeping the girl waiting for some time, she appeared wearing her very oldest cloak, and her shabbiest bonnet. Betty suggested some change in her attire. "No; I will not change it. I am poor, and she knows it. I shall make no attempt to conceal it—you may wear whatever you like."

Betty said no more, so they set out together.

"Shall we drive?" said Mrs Musgrave, when they got to the corner of the street.

"Oh no, mother; why? the 'bus is there waiting."

"Bah! you are getting so mean, Betty." Then, suddenly changing her tone, "You shall have everything, my darling, as long as I can give it to you. I won't have *your* young life starved."

She signalled for a hansom, and they got in, but when they had driven about half-way, Mrs Musgrave exclaimed, "I don't want to go to Mrs Wentworth's, Betty. She will begin to bother me with questions about your father and so on—my feelings can't stand it. I shall just take a walk in the Park, and then go home. You can go alone."

In vain Betty protested, she utterly refused to go, and the girl had just to do as she wished, and go on by herself.

Mrs Wentworth had not forgotten her promise to Oliver. She had told him that if he came on Tuesday afternoon he would see the girl again. It happened that he had arrived just a moment before, and he was waiting alone in the drawing-room when Betty came in.

He recognised her in an instant, and his heart gave a quick jump. Betty looked very shy, until Oliver made some small remark to her, when his happy, kindly manner won her confidence. They were talking away quite gaily when Mrs Wentworth hobbled into the room. She took the girl by both hands, welcoming her kindly. Then she turned to Oliver, "I do not think that Miss Musgrave remembers you, Oliver? Have you told her when you saw her last." Betty started, not remembering anything about him, until the old lady explained what she meant, then her face lighted up with one of her sudden smiles. "I remember all about it now! You were a fat, white boy, and you told me you were a person of much importance." Oliver laughed; but he did not quite like that reminiscence even then.

He stayed on until he had no excuse for staying any longer, then, reluctantly took his leave.

Betty talked more freely after he had gone. She sat down on a stool by Mrs Wentworth's knee, and looked up in her face with eyes that

seemed mutely to be asking for help in some unuttered trouble. All that she spoke about was cheerful enough. Mrs Wentworth felt more puzzled than before. She saw that the girl liked to speak about her aunt, and did not like much to speak about her mother, but she felt that she could not question her closely about their mode of life, or their plans, for Betty's black eyebrows lifted pathetically whenever she mentioned their future. "I don't think we can go away in summer," she said, asking innocently, "Is it *very* hot in town in summer? I have never been there when it was." "Yes; I'm afraid you would find it very hot, my dear. But you have promised to come and stay with me—perhaps your mother will allow you to stay for some time."

"I cannot leave her alone," said Betty. She looked down as she spoke, and hurried her words. "It is very kind of you to ask me, but I never leave her."

"Then perhaps she will come too?" Betty murmured a reply, from which Mrs Wentworth concluded that this arrangement would not be desirable.

"Well, perhaps when the time comes, you will find that you can leave her for a little while. It is better for two people who are always together, to part now and then."

She kissed the girl when she bade her good-bye. Betty clung to her for a moment, almost as if she were about to ask her something, then turned shyly and quickly away. Mrs Went-

worth had sent for a cab; she would not allow her to walk home by herself—no great kindness from her point of view, but to Betty, delicately nurtured as she had been, the long walk through the muddy, crowded streets was dreadful, and to have some one care for her again, made her feel less desolate.

She reached home feeling quite warm and cheerful, and ran into the sitting-room to find her mother. She was not there, but Betty stopped to gaze in astonishment at the contents of a parcel which lay open on the table. It contained a piece, of many yards, of rich brocaded silk; some good lace, of the value of which Betty had only a dim idea, was laid across it. Mrs Musgrave entered the room, as Betty stood looking at it. "Mother, where in all the world did this come from? Who sent it?" she asked.

"No one sent it. I bought it, child; it is for you. You have nothing fit to wear."

"But oh, mother," Betty turned to look at her. "I don't need it; I don't want it; I wouldn't wear a dress like that even if we could afford it."

"Afford it!" echoed her mother. She came up, and leaned on the mantelshelf, looking at Betty with wandering, bloodshot eyes. "Afford it! that I should live to be ordered about and dictated to by my own child! Who is the best judge of what I can afford!"

"We must send it back at once, mother," said Betty. Her face had grown pale, as she glanced at the bill that lay beside the parcel. "You know

that we cannot pay for that. We are in debt as it is. I will take it back, dear mother." She laid her hand on Mrs Musgrave's arm, her voice trembled. "I will go myself and explain about it."

Mrs Musgrave stamped her foot, her face inflamed with sudden, senseless fury.

"You will! will you!" she cried. "Explain! Yes, do—tell them everything—say I have no money! Say I've been drinking—before God I——"

"Oh mother!—oh mother! mother!" called the girl, clinging to her arm, looking pitifully into her face, "Hush—hush, do—everyone in the house will hear you."

"And do you suppose that I care who hears me! You miserable girl! You viper! But I'll not let you do that, at least."

She caught the whole bundle of lace, worth many pounds, and before Betty could prevent her she had crammed it into the grate. "There, there!" she called, pressing it into the heart of the fire, so that her own fingers were burnt, as the flames caught up the filmy fabric. "Now, will you take it back! Now, will you disgrace your own mother!" Her voice had risen to a scream; she stood on the hearth-rug, breathing heavily, her face flushed crimson.

Betty had stood helpless; she could not struggle with her, do what she might. When the door opened, and the landlady came in, she did not say a single word, only looked round at her with

great blue eyes that seemed to burn with pain.

"Dear, dear! madam! This is dreadful! Whatever is the matter?" said the good woman, advancing with a bold front towards Mrs Musgrave, who, at first tried to push her away, and then lurched heavily back against the sofa.

"Leave her to me, miss. Go away—there's a dear young lady, go!" said Mrs Pomfret. But Betty would not leave the room.

Later on in the evening, when her mother had at last been persuaded to allow them to help her to bed, and had dropped off into a heavy sleep, Mrs Pomfret crept into the room, where Betty sat motionless by the bed.

"Do you let me make you a cup o' tea, Miss Betty. Come an' 'ave it downstairs, no harm'll come to her now; they sleeps it off," she said, looking at the figure on the bed.

Betty shook her head, without moving from her chair.

"'Ow did she get it, miss? Never a drop in my 'ouse, as you know—an' it was only yesterday she's come to me, an' I refused to lend her money. She 'adn't a sixpence then."

Again Betty shook her head; she had her own knowledge.

"I'm that sorry, miss," continued Mrs Pomfret. "Charlotte and I, we would do almost anything for you, as you know; but I have my family to consider—my boys growin' up, and I get my livin' by these rooms, and the lady on the first

floor has said to me she'll give notice." She paused, twisting her apron in her fingers, her eyes filled with tears of genuine sorrow for the girl. "No, no, miss; you mustn't go away now," she continued, when Betty had begun to speak; "but we must be careful not to let her out alone—and perhaps it'll not occur again."

"Thank you, Mrs Pomfret, you are very kind—you must think of yourself sometimes. I know. I will do all that I can—and then, if—" her voice trembled, "if it happens again, I will look out for rooms somewhere else."

When the woman had gone, Betty rose, and taking a key from the table, opened her mother's dressing-case. It had contained little before; it was empty now. She sat down again by the bedside, and pushed the sheet off her mother's hand—the diamond ring that she always used to wear was gone. It had been given to her by her husband on their wedding-day.

Betty leaned back in her chair, and covered her face with her hands.

CHAPTER IX

“**I** MUST see that girl again—I must—I must,” said Oliver to himself. He sat on a chair in the Park, not watching the passers-by, but staring away through the branches of the trees at the shifting clouds. His imagination kindled readily, and it was blazing now. He saw Betty standing beside him at St Julliets: walking through the fields: sitting in church: he endowed her with every intellectual grace also—with a flavour of wit, and powers of mind far beyond reality. He was sure that she would understand, almost without the telling, all that he had ever thought or felt. None of the former idols of his fancy had ever appealed to him so. It was like entering a new country, strange and delightful. But how was he ever to see her again? Mrs Wentworth had gone home. They had, so far as he knew, no other acquaintance in common. He remembered that he had been told the name of the street where she lived—well, there could be no harm in walking past her doors. So off he went on a fool’s errand such as he himself would formerly have been the first to laugh at, and he walked slowly up the dingy street and looked at the respectable windows and read the ticket, “Apartments,” and then walked slowly

down again once more, being rewarded for his pains by nothing more romantic than the sight of the milkman standing with his pails by the area gate. He did not dare to walk past the windows too often, and had left the street, and gone half-way down the next one, when he came to a little crowd collected on the pavement. Just as Oliver came up the people scattered, and he saw in their midst a woman who was struggling with a policeman. Her bonnet had fallen awry, and her torn veil fluttered in the wind; she was talking in a loud, discordant voice, trying to wrench herself from the policeman's grasp. "Been a lady too—poor wretch," thought Oliver, as he hurried past them. He looked up at the sky as he came to the corner of the street—the clouds were driven apart, and the sweet, sudden blue reminded him of Betty Musgrave's eyes. He would like, he thought, to have her picture, painted against just such a background as that blue sky of March, with the rare flowers of early spring in her hand, and the bare trees behind—he saw it in a moment. And it would be hung at the end of the long corridor at St Julliets, "just where those horrid fighting Herons are now," he added, and then began to laugh at himself for a fool. He still wore an amused look when he came into the club, so that someone asked him what had put him into such good humour. "Is it so uncommon?" said Oliver. A man who had been talking to his friend in the window had moved away as Oliver came

up. "Who is he?" Oliver asked, looking after him.

"Oh, his name's Smythe," said the other. "Do you know him?"

"No; and I don't want to," Oliver replied, eyeing Smythe critically. He was an alert-looking, rather tall, middle-aged man, with white hair, bright blue eyes, and an effusive manner. As Oliver watched him, he stood gesticulating with his hands. They could overhear part of what he said.

"Very sad," he was saying, "fine woman, too, in her day—perfect lady—got as pretty a little daughter as you'll see anywhere—gone all to the dogs though—very sad—drink—drink——" He lowered his voice, and moved a little farther off, so that they heard no more. Oliver remembered for an instant the little scene in the street—something brought it back to him. "What a brute that man is!" he said.

"Smythe?" said his friend. "Not at all; he's a harmless old fellow. What's made you dislike him all of a sudden?"

"Doctor Fell," said Oliver.

He left town that afternoon, and got home in the evening. When he came into the drawing-room his mother was sitting alone; there were pink flowers and a shaded lamp on the table beside her; the rings on her white hands twinkled as she moved her knitting-pins; all around her in the comfortable room was an atmosphere of settled peace and prosperity. Oliver, with an

unwonted movement of affection (after his first greeting was over), came up to her and laid his hand on her shoulder. She patted it with her own plump, soft ones.

"The Rorkes were here yesterday," she remarked; "they are staying at Brendon. I was sorry you were not at home, Oliver."

"Oh!" said Oliver, who was not. He dropped her hand, and moved away.

"Yes," continued his mother, "Kathleen is just the sort of girl that I should like for a wife for you, Oliver." She paused, and Oliver, whistling to himself, began to unwind her ball of wool.

"She's so well-bred, and so sensible," pursued Mrs Lacy, "and not too good-looking."

"You consider that an advantage?" Oliver asked, casting an eye on his mother.

"Yes, I do—of course it is; those excessively pretty girls that are made such a fuss about are never nice; they are entirely taken up with themselves."

"That's not confined to beauties."

"Oh, well, you know what I mean—they don't make *good wives*," said his mother, "they won't sink themselves in their husbands' interests," she continued. "I would say, indeed, that no *beautiful* woman (so called, for really I don't know that I've ever seen a *beautiful* woman) can make a really good mother."

"I see—that's an objection of course," said Oliver. He spoke with gravity, continuing to

unwind the ball, but his mouth twitched with a repressed smile.

"A married woman's first thought," Mrs Lacy went on, for she liked to pursue a subject to the end; "ought always to be her husband and children." She looked at Oliver, adding, with simple conviction, "Of course, if you're always thinking about your complexion or your figure, you can't do that."

"Of course not."

"Kathleen is not too clever either," continued his mother; "that's worse."

"So I should imagine," said Oliver, beginning to wind up the ball again.

"Much worse," said Mrs Lacy; "that leads to all sorts of things—I've seen it repeatedly with that kind of woman—odd acquaintances, and a feeling of being misunderstood, and, even if it goes far enough, to writing books."

"And Kathleen is neither good-looking nor clever; well, I remember I thought her very sweet when she was sixteen; I'm sorry."

"Don't be silly, Oliver; you know what I mean. She's just a charming, sweet-tempered, nice-looking girl, who plays very well indeed, and can talk sensibly on any reasonable subject; not too good-looking, or too clever, or too pious, or sarcastic, or anything."

"I see—the very wife for a selfish man," said Oliver. He looked up after a minute. "It's a thousand pities, mother, that *you* weren't the wife of a retired grocer in the suburbs, with eight children."

"I hope I should have tried to do my duty, even in that position," replied his mother, with a placid smile.

"You would, I'm sure, have done it so admirably—kept such a neat, comfortable house." She smiled again at the compliment, and Oliver laughed to himself.

CHAPTER X

A FEW days after Oliver had seen him at the club, Mr Smythe found his way to the Musgraves' lodgings. Mrs Musgrave happened to be out—she often insisted upon going out alone. "I won't be watched," she said to Betty, when the girl tried to accompany her. During her absence Betty was always miserable, and would run to the door with heart beating fast, whenever she heard her come in. She knew at once from the sound of Mr Smythe's voice in the hall who her visitor was, and looked surprised and anything but pleased to see him. He came in smiling effusively, shaking hands with a prolonged pressure, and taking a chair as close to her as possible, bent forwards looking into her face.

"You are losing your roses, Miss Musgrave—the town air is not good for them."

"I do not go out very much."

"Ah—stay with your mother, I daresay—very right—very right!"

Betty murmured an answer, and looked around her in despair. Would her mother never come in! It gave her a peculiar sensation of half-paralysed self-consciousness to be left alone with this man. She tried to carry on the halting conversation.

"I like to stay with my mother as much as possible."

Mr Smythe bent forwards, laying his hand on hers. Betty instantly withdrew it. He coughed in slight confusion, and continued :

"Very right—mustn't leave her too much alone—broods on things, and gets melancholy, I daresay."

"A little," said Betty, drily.

"Nervous temperament. Ah! I understand it well. It must be a great trial to you, my dear."

"I don't think I quite know what you mean," Betty answered in an even voice, but her lips trembled. He gazed at her convincingly, tenderly.

"Ah! excuse me, but I think you do. It is very hard indeed on you, Miss Musgrave. I can assure you that I feel for you——"

Betty attempted to rise, but he detained her. "Stay a moment. A disagreeable subject is best treated firmly. I can assure you that a few pounds here or there is nothing to me. I would willingly have offered a much larger sum, but——"

Betty turned her face full upon him ; the pride in it struggled with despair.

"Has my mother borrowed money from *you* ?" she asked, putting unintentional contempt into her emphasis upon the personal pronoun. Mr Smythe's eyes sparkled with anger, then he controlled himself, and bowed assent to her question.

"How much?" Betty asked, in a faint voice, her eyelids drooping over her eyes.

"Ah! merely a few pounds—nothing, on my honour. I assure you—nothing. I would, as I said, most gladly have offered more, but I felt that, for your sake——"

He stopped short, for the girl had leant back in her chair, and turned her face away from him. She was breathing hard.

"I cannot offer to pay you just now," she said, "for I have not got any money in the house; but if you will tell me how much my mother asked you to lend her, I will send it to you to-morrow."

"Ah, it is nothing,"

"Please tell me at once," said Betty, without looking at him.

"I think—h'm—I think I gave her ten pounds."

"Thank you," said the girl. She added, "And will you promise me that you will *never* do this again?"

"Oh, if it distresses you——"

Betty turned her eyes on him without speaking. The look in them was that of a dumb animal in pain. But still he noticed the soft outline of her cheek, the richly fringed eyelids, the melting curves of her lips, and his manner became yet more gallant.

"If I can assist you in any way, my dear Miss Musgrave, believe me, that it will be the greatest honour—pleasure——"

Betty cut him short.

"The best assistance that you can give me is never, never, whatever my mother may say to you, to do such a thing again."

She gave him her hand, submitting, in a cold, reluctant way, to his effusive leave-taking.

When he had left the room, she walked up and down, biting her lips, with her hands clenched tight. "What next. Oh! what next. Oh, that horrible man," she said to herself.

Mrs Musgrave did not return for some time. When she came in, her colour had been heightened by the damp wind, and her step was quite steady. She looked handsome, and young for her age, and Betty, as she saw her, remembered the beauty of her youth. "You are cold, mother. Come and let me warm your little hands," she said, dropping on her knees on the rug, and beginning to rub her mother's useless-looking little white hands between her own. "Mr Smythe was here when you were out," she said, presently.

Mrs Musgrave withdrew one hand, holding it before her face as if to shield her eyes from the fire. "Oh! was he. What did you talk about, child? You don't like him?"

"I hate him," Betty answered. She got up from the rug where she had been kneeling and took up her work again. Mrs Musgrave pretended to read the newspaper, casting, every now and then, a glance at the girl, who sat sewing in silence. Not a word passed between them for a few minutes. Then Betty saw that she was crying. She heard the tears drop one by one on the newspaper, but her mother did not utter a sob lest the girl should notice. For

a little Betty tried to ignore it, then she got up and walked over to where her mother sat, and knelt again by her side.

"What is the matter?" she asked, adding in a low voice, "I know all about it—he told me. We will pay it back and forget, mother."

Mrs Musgrave bent and hid her face on Betty's shoulder. "Ah!" she sobbed, "I am a wicked woman. You must go away and leave me, Betty. You must go away."

"No, no; I will not leave you, you know"; she soothed her with kind words. "All will be right again if you will only try—try hard, mother—try—I'll help you all I can."

As her mother clung to her, the girl's heart was softened again with her childish love. Perhaps, after all, she might save her yet. Ah! the soft cheek that she used to love to feel against her own—wet with tears; the arms that she used to love to feel around her—now clinging to her for strength! Betty kissed her and caressed her, talking to her with such a depth of earnest hope, that it seemed as if the strength of her love must draw its object away from any peril—out of any "slough of despond."

All the rest of that evening Mrs Musgrave sat quiet and subdued. The next day, humble and timid, like a child that has recovered from a fit of temper, and knows itself forgiven, she made pitiful efforts to employ herself (she had always been an idle woman), and allowed the girl to take her out. They walked together in Kensington

Gardens. Betty felt a lump rise in her throat, as she watched her mother's sad, listless gaze at the children playing on the broad walk, and the way in which she every now and then tried to brighten up and make a remark, fearing that Betty noticed her depression.

For a week or so after this she seemed a good deal brighter. They sat together in the evenings talking pleasantly. Mrs Musgrave became less excitable in manner, and more reasonable as the change in her habits grew longer, and hope, a timid, storm-beaten hope, like the first green shoots that were beginning to pierce through the winter earth in the gardens, began to raise itself in Betty's heart.

CHAPTER XI

ONE day, after two or three weeks of comparative peace had passed, Mrs Musgrave sank into hopeless depression. Betty knew well enough now what that meant. She must make some effort at once to combat it, she felt, so she went that very afternoon to see a doctor who had attended Mrs Musgrave once, when they first came to town. He was not even an acquaintance, but a kind, good man who pitied the girl from the bottom of his heart. He advised her to do the only thing that in such a case could be of any use—to try to persuade her mother to submit herself to restraint for some time. "Then let her start afresh—and there may be some hope," he added, against his own conviction, for Betty's eyes troubled him.

"I couldn't say that to her."

"Well, it must be said—you have had to say worse things than that to her, I should think."

"We never speak about it directly. I have only done so once—I couldn't." She flushed as she spoke.

"Well, well, I'll do it," said he. "I'll call to-morrow."

"How much will it cost?" Betty asked. The sum he named filled her with dismay.

"It is her only chance," he repeated, watching the girl's face, "her only chance. Have you no friend who can help you for this once?"

"No," said Betty: she was very proud. "I think we can afford it," she added, and the man who a moment before had thoughts of offering her some help, felt himself unable to say any more.

He came, as he had promised, the very next day. Betty left him alone with her mother. She sat upstairs, listening with pained intentness to the sound of their voices below. She heard her mother's voice raised in anger; then a long argument; then at last the door opened.

She ran to meet the doctor in the hall. "It's all right," he said kindly; "she'll go on Monday."

Betty found her mother standing greatly excited in the sitting-room. "Well," she said, as the girl came in, "you wish to be rid of me, Betty. I don't wonder—I'll go, I'll go; but I know it will kill me—the humiliation—the horror of it." She wrung her hands. Betty comforted her as well as she could; it was very difficult, for the whole subject had been for so long tacitly ignored between them, that, strange as it may seem, the girl felt that no power on earth could ever make her utter in plain words what they were talking about. She had tried many a time, but her lips simply could not frame the sentence. She used to wonder sometimes, when she heard people glibly talking about "Temperance," "Drunken-

ness," and so on, had any of them ever lived in the same house with the thing—dreadful—not to be forgotten—shadowing every hour of life, and yet unnameable!

She did not even mention the question of money to her mother at all, knowing that she would only be too glad to catch at the smallest excuse for refusing to go. Betty had two hundred pounds in the bank in her own name, still remaining from the money that her aunt had left to her: the greater part of it had already gone in part-payment of their debts. It was all that now lay between them and gulfs that as yet she knew nothing of, for their small income was entirely in Mrs Musgrave's hands, and seemed to melt away like water.

"The last chance," thought the girl, as she drew the money. "If that fails we can both go down together."

On Monday Mrs Musgrave went away.

After she had gone, Betty lived in almost complete solitude, for they had no intimate friends in town; but she was happier than she had been for long. Three weeks passed, and then she got a letter from Mrs Wentworth, reminding her of her promise to pay a visit at St Julliets.

Betty would have been only too delighted to go, had she known how to account for her mother's absence. At last she composed an answer to the letter, which she expressed as truthfully as she could, without telling the

whole matter. She accepted Mrs Wentworth's invitation for the following week, simply adding that she would be very glad to come, as her mother was away from home, the doctor having ordered her a complete change.

"Why has the girl not gone with her, I wonder?" was Mrs Wentworth's first remark when she got Betty's note. She was glad to have the girl alone. "Oliver is away!" she exclaimed. Her husband looked up at her with a smile. "Well, Samuel, of course it would be much nicer for the girl to have some young person close at hand."

"Oh—much!" he admitted, adding, "Perhaps Oliver will return before she goes."

Mrs Wentworth remarked that after all it did not matter—another girl would be a better companion for Betty than Oliver could be; and she said no more about it, only, when her husband told her on the following day that Oliver was coming back at the end of the week, she answered cheerfully, "Oh, *that's* all right then," which made the rector smile.

CHAPTER XII

BETTY had not left London even for a day since she came there six months before. When she got out at the little station at St Julliot's, she stood still on the platform, after the train had gone, forgetting to move, drinking in long breaths of the fresh country air. She was looking about her with delight when Mr Wentworth came up, saying: "You must be Betty Musgrave, I think." Then, as his voice recalled her to the present, Betty turned to him, all her face flushing its lovely pink. She walked with him to the gate where the little pony-carriage waited for them, speaking shyly, and feeling rather frightened; but as they drove off, going slowly up the hill towards the Rectory, she sat up in the carriage, looking from side to side, exclaiming in an ecstasy of pleasure. That year the spring had come very early: the hedges were all budding, the air alive with birds. As Betty listened, she could hear the tremulous cry of the lambs from the bright green fields; the croaking of the frogs, the whistling of the thrushes, and, as they drove across the bridge, the falling of the shallow river: it all filled her heart with new life. The old man sat watching her, his shrewd face puckered up into a smile. "Ah, Oliver, my young friend," he said to himself,

"it will perhaps be well if your affairs detain you for some time."

They reached the top of the slight hill where the Rectory, an old whitewashed house, stood, half-veiled by the budding trees. The straight, broad walk that led up to the door was bordered with the blue and yellow flowers of spring; and Mrs Wentworth stood at the door to welcome Betty with outstretched hands.

The girl got out of the carriage and ran towards her, holding up her face to be kissed, like a child.

"Oh! it is such a beautiful place—everything smells so sweet after town," she cried, as the old lady led her into the house. When she had been left alone in her own room, she stood for a moment, with clasped hands, looking about her. It was quiet and dainty—the small windows were hung with chintz curtains covered with a design of rigid little rosebuds; stiff old prints hung on the walls; a scent of hyacinths came up from the garden beds, and birds chattered amongst the ivy. How home-like, how peaceful, how cheerful it all was. She came downstairs again quite gaily, stopping half-way to lift up a kitten that she met on the staircase and carry it into the drawing-room. As she sat in the stiff, cheerful room that evening, she talked away to the old lady, just as any happy, careless girl of her age might have done, only Mrs Wentworth could not fail to notice that she did not like to speak about her mother; and that whenever she sat in silence, the same look of unuttered trouble crept over her face. "She

looks like a lily—no, a rose, that has been out in a storm, eh?" Mrs Wentworth said to the rector when Betty had gone to bed—she had a habit of concluding her sentences sharply, because her husband was always very slow in expressing his opinion, and she liked assent when she talked.

"Yees—a—very—beautiful—pale—pink—rose," he answered, in his deliberate way.

"Been out in the rain, though—what can it be, Samuel? Do you think it is poverty, or that it's just the mother?"

"It—might—be—a—variety of things—my dear."

Mrs Wentworth thrummed on her chair.

"What do you mean? What kind of things, for instance?"

"Well—love—or neuralgia—so many young people nowadays——"

"It's neither," his wife replied, with decision. "It's nothing personal. I can see that. It is something from the outside."

"You're—very—observant, my dear," he said.

"I am," the lady replied. "I could soon read that child's face like a book, if once I had the key to it."

She watched Betty closely the next day. But down she came in the morning, fresh, and showing no traces of fatigue, yet still with the same shadow in her eyes.

During the two days that followed she seemed to be perfectly contented and almost gay. She played with the kittens; she ran all about the

house, from the kitchen to the rector's study singing to herself, pulling flowers in the garden, or talking to the old people, as happy as a child—but every now and then, seemed to remember something that sobered her for a few moments, making her suddenly look old and grave.

"This will never do, Samuel! I cannot bear to see that look come over a young face," said Mrs Wentworth on the third evening, when Betty had gone to bed. She had been very bright all day, until the letters came in, and then had said she was sleepy, and had gone away earlier than usual. "She wasn't sleepy. She was vexed by something. There is something weighing on her mind. What can we do to amuse her?" said Mrs Wentworth.

"She does not seem in want of amusement; she appears perfectly contented," said the rector.

"Yes; that is the worst of it. She has no business, at her age, to be contented with two old bores like you and me, Samuel; it's quite unnatural."

"There's—the—curate," suggested Mr Wentworth. "*Mrs* Lacy," he went on, raising an eyebrow.

"I see no joke," said his wife. "There could be nothing better, to my mind, than for Oliver and that girl to amuse each other. I do love to see two nice young people together—it is good for both of them."

"And what will the mother say?"

"Which mother? *Mrs* Lacy?"

"Either—both."

"Say, Samuel! Why—when?"

"When it all comes to an end."

"An end! Really, you talk nonsense sometimes, Samuel! You know that I am not a match-maker. What end could it possibly come to?"

"You—mean—well."

"I do not mean anything, you *know* that," said Mrs Wentworth, who was quite vexed. "I never would; I think it is wrong. Those things are in Higher Hands."

"I'm—not—so—sure—about—that," said the rector.

"Why, Samuel, I do not like even to hear you say such a thing."

"Well," said the rector, deliberately. "To bring a young man and a beautiful girl much into each other's company, is like putting fire and flax side by side, and then saying it's in Higher Hands if they ignite."

"There would be no end to one's responsibilities," said his wife.

"There—is—no—end—that I can see."

"Dear me! I'm thankful I don't think so. Besides, Oliver is not the sort of man to trifle with any girl—seriously, I mean." Silence. "Eh?" said Mrs Wentworth.

"Well," said her husband again, "Oliver is a fine fellow, and my very good friend."

"Then, what more do you want?"

The rector seemed at a loss for a reply. He closed "Gibbon," carefully placing his marker in

it, and looked up at his wife. "My love," he said, "a very wise man has told us 'Barriers are for those that cannot fly.' You ought to remember that the majority, even of young people, have no wings. Circumstances have been known"—he paused and smiled (for Mrs Wentworth had had money, and he had been very poor)—"to present serious obstacles—even to true love—for a while."

"But, oh! Samuel, the girl is so sweet."

"Ask Mrs Lacy if *she* thinks so, to-morrow," said the rector. As he spoke, the door bell rang, and the next minute Oliver himself was shown into the room.

"Why, Oliver, I did not know that you had come home!" said Mrs Wentworth.

"Yes; I came back this afternoon. I thought I would step down after dinner, and see how you were." He looked round the room.

"She's gone to bed—country air makes her sleepy," said Mr Wentworth, fixing a twinkling eye on the young man. Oliver burst out laughing, and held out his hand.

"I'll be off then, sir! Good - night, Mrs Wentworth."

"My wife is bringing Miss Musgrave over to see your mother," began the rector. "Ah——!" he exclaimed, looking over his spectacles, for the door opened, and Betty came innocently into the room.

"I brought down Aunt Elizabeth's photograph," she began; "I found it upstairs—" then, seeing

Oliver, she stopped, and shook hands with him.

He stayed only for a minute. No one said anything the least remarkable, but the very fluttering of Cupid's wings might have been heard in the little room, so bright and peaceful, smelling of fresh earth and spring flowers from the pots of hyacinths on the tables. The two old people looked on from their atmosphere of benignant old age. It was one of those moments which have no circumstance in any way remarkable to account for the impression that they make, which sometimes print themselves indelibly on the memory, to be recalled long after more eventful scenes have been forgotten.

"Good - night," said Oliver. "We'll see you to-morrow?"

"Thank you—good-night," said the girl—and that was all.

CHAPTER XIII

AFTER she had seen Betty for the first time, Mrs Lacy, in her own mind, echoed the sentiments of the *Edinburgh Review* concerning Wordsworth—"This will never do," she thought, for here, in flesh and blood, was a girl the very epitome of all that she did not want Oliver to marry. She was penniless, and she was beautiful; she looked as if she had decided opinions of her own, and even Mrs Wentworth had acknowledged that "the mother was peculiar."

Oliver made no secret of his admiration. He had been down at the Rectory every day, every single day since he came home. His mother did not close her eyes to the fact. "Of course, they are not much alone together," she reflected; "but, then, having a person like Mrs Wentworth is much worse than being alone—it makes them less conscious." She ruminated over the possibilities. "If I ask people to the house he will just neglect them. He's got nothing particular to interest him at present—it may pass off when the Elections come on," she very sensibly added. She was extremely suave in her manner to Betty when they met, and made Mrs Wentworth promise to bring her to tea one afternoon when she knew that Oliver would be out, and was rewarded for

her pains by the young man returning audaciously at an hour when he never appeared in general.

"I'm going to take Miss Musgrave out to see the gardens, mother," he said; adding, "It's much too cold for you, Mrs Wentworth; you can stay with my mother."

He wanted to see Betty, standing as he had always pictured her, with the blue sky of March and the bare trees behind her. He wished to get the picture clearly into his mind.

They walked out together, Betty stopping every now and then to look at the flowers, pleased as a child with the fresh, spring weather, and the contentment that she felt in Oliver's presence.

"Are you not dull down there by yourself, with only the dear old people?" he asked.

"Dull! oh, no! I am so happy that the day seems too short. It is so delightful to be in the country."

"It is; but when I was young," said Oliver, "I liked to be in town."

Betty drew her eyebrows together, inquiringly. He did not seem to notice, and went on, "I know better now. Life is too short to be always in a hurry, as you are in town. You find by the end of the week, that seven country days seem much longer, sweeter, than seven town days that have been all pressed together—and as you begin to value life more, you don't want to waste any of it."

"It depends," answered Betty, slowly, "whether you are happy or not."

"Are you not happy?" he asked.

"I?—no," said Betty, and was silent.

Oliver said nothing at all until they had wandered down the whole length of the garden and passed again by the sheltered walk where the violets grew: their sweet breath came faintly on the wind. Then, as he and Betty climbed the stone steps that led up to the front lawn, Oliver turned and looked down at the girl. "I wish that I could make you happy," he said.

"Nobody can," Betty replied, with chill abruptness, but her cheeks grew warm, and the next minute she showed all her dimples with a quick smile.

"I should like at least to try," Oliver said in a low voice, as he followed her into the house.

After Betty and Mrs Wentworth had gone, Oliver came up to his mother. "I want you to ask Miss Musgrave and the Wentworths to dinner next week," he said.

Mrs Lacy answered, with much sweetness, "Certainly. What night shall we ask them on?" Inwardly she thought, "I must not oppose it openly. I am *not* feeling very well, and by Friday I can easily have a headache and put them off."

"How do you like Mrs Lacy?" Mrs Wentworth would fain have inquired, as she and Betty walked home. Prudence, however, prevented her making the remark. She thought the girl looked pleased, but when they came into the house, and she found a letter from her mother on the

hall table, she caught it up, and ran away, with her colour fading quickly.

"It's the mother, evidently," thought the old lady. Betty reappeared in a few minutes, smiling again. A letter from her mother always meant a moment of horrible anxiety before she knew its contents. This one had been much more cheerful, containing few complaints, and ending with some expressions of love that had made the girl very glad.

The rector, as she came in, was imprudent enough to ask the very question at which his wife had hesitated.

"Well, my dear, and how do you like Mrs Lacy?" he said, regarding Betty over his spectacles.

She laughed back at him, answering, in her innocent way, "Not very much, I think—she purrs."

"A—hopeful—beginning," Mr Wentworth remarked to his wife, when Betty was out of hearing.

"Oh, Samuel, we are going to dine there on Friday, and I really do not think *anyone* can help liking Betty."

"Mrs Lacy—has—a—mother's—heart," he answered.

CHAPTER XIV

FRIDAY came, and to Mrs Lacy the fates were kind, for Betty by that time had taken a severe cold. On Thursday morning Mrs Lacy had seen her, and had been most pressing in her hopes that she would be able to come to dinner the next day. "With such a cold," she thought, "Venus herself would look ugly—and, besides, everyone is cross and stupid with a heavy cold. She could not come at a better time."

When Friday evening came, Betty felt sorely disinclined to go out. She shuddered over her toilette, and took a paroxysm of sneezing just as she followed Mrs Wentworth into the drawing-room. Mrs Lacy received them affably, pressed Betty's hand in her own soft one, and led her to a seat close by the fire. After a glance that assured her the girl's swollen features and watery eyes were not to be dreaded, she directed her conversation to the old lady. But the rector, a keener observer than Mrs Lacy, smiled to himself as he saw how Oliver drew a screen behind Betty's chair, moved the light away from her eyes, and seated himself by her without so much as a glance at the clock. "I believe he's forgotten that there is such a thing as dinner," he thought. "If a man

finds the five minutes beforehand short, he is pretty far gone."

The meal was dull enough, for Oliver had ears for no one but Betty, whose conversations was pretty well limited to "Yes" and "No," and sneezes.

Mrs Lacy had seen many a one of Oliver's earlier fancies nipped in the bud by some trifle less than this. The girl looked all that a mother's heart could desire, as she sat in the drawing-room after dinner: her face was pale; her nose was red; her eyes were dim—yet—yet—yet—Mrs Lacy grew uneasy as she saw Oliver's air of solicitude when he came upstairs. "I have ordered the carriage to take you home," he said to Mrs Wentworth, "Miss Musgrave cannot drive in the pony-cart to-night." Mrs Lacy's face fell. The old lady protested, but Oliver was firm. Betty, too stupefied to notice anything, did not hear what they were saying. It seemed a very long half-hour to her till Mrs Wentworth said they must go. Oliver felt her little fevered hand in his as she said good-night—he longed to take hold of both of them, and caress her, and make of her as if she had been a sick child. The force of his feelings astonished himself. Standing on the steps when the carriage had driven off, he lifted up his face in a pleased way to the empty sky, where a gay, yellow moon was sailing.

"*This is how a mother feels, I declare,*" he said. "Bless her, bless her! I'm not such a selfish beast after all." He sauntered along in front of

the house, bareheaded as he was, noting the delicious quality of the spring night.

"How plain that girl looks without a colour," said his mother when he came in.

"A cold in the head doesn't improve anyone," said Oliver.

"I was asking Mrs Wentworth about the mother," pursued Mrs Lacy. Oliver looked alert in an instant. "She says that she is *most peculiar*. Indeed, she has reason to believe that she is half-insane or something. She is going to be away alone somewhere for some time."

Oliver looked into the fire and said nothing, but his face was grave.

"How did she know?" he asked, at length.

"I suppose the girl told her. It is sad for her, poor thing. I feel it may be a duty to be kind to her," said his mother, who began to feel less afraid.

They went upstairs together. Oliver stopped when he got to the end of the long corridor, and, raising his candle, with a smile, he looked at the other end where the fighting Herons were dimly visible.

"I hate those birds at the other end, mother," he said. "We must get something else to put there."

Mrs Lacy bade him good-night with an easier mind.

The rector and his wife were talking as usual. "That poor child looked very ill, Samuel!" said she.

"Yes," assented the rector, with a chuckle.

"Mrs Lacy remarked to me how entirely her beauty depended on complexion. I'm afraid that she didn't think her at all pretty to-night."

"She?"

"*They*, then—*he*!" said Mrs Wentworth.

"I fear not. Oliver is too fond of beauty," said her husband, smiling.

"Oh, Samuel!" said the old lady, "I do *not* wish to be a matchmaker. Heaven forbid that I should try to meddle with other people's lives; but everything seems so fortunate about this—if it goes on well. Oliver has no need to marry a wife with money. I feel that that poor child needs a home. I am sure she does. My heart aches as I look at her. *Can* there be any harm in just standing aside and looking on, and seeing what Providence will do?"

"You may be sure of this," said the rector, "that whatever Providence does will be something very different from *our* wishes. Do you not remember what old Granny Jones said one day, 'Man appoints, sir, God disappoints'?"

"Ah!" she answered, and sighed and smiled, with tears in her eyes, "I have not forgotten, dearest—but we are not all led by the same road."

Betty, as she lay awake, choking and stupid, could have expressed only the most elementary thoughts: "How nice he is; his eyes look as if he were always laughing; I think he likes me; I hope he does; I hope he will take us up the river on Monday as he said." Then, with a sudden remembrance, "Ah! if he knew about mother!"

CHAPTER XV

THEY sat on a bank above the river. Betty gazing at the scene before them; Oliver looking at her.

They had rowed up the river—not far, for it was too shallow to ascend for any great way. Then Mrs Wentworth had gone to make a call at a farmhouse near by, leaving Betty with Oliver. He tied up the boat, and they climbed to the top of the steep bank, where they sat talking of indifferent trifles. In the pauses of their talk, the shallow river rippled down below, and the birds piped from the budding thickets behind them; conversation halted sadly for a while.

I am told that during rustic courtship, the custom is generally to maintain a long, expressive silence. Pity 'tis that it does not prevail in every rank, for there always comes a stage on that journey when speech is merely a hindrance. Having not yet the freedom to talk openly of love, and all other subjects being dull, it seems unnecessary to be obliged to keep up a feint of conversation when an unconstrained silence would be infinitely better.

Said Betty, "I suppose that Mrs Wentworth will stay at the farm for some time?" (*"Oh, I*

wish that I did not feel so stupid! Why can't I talk?")

"For about half-an-hour, she said. It's not cold here, is it?" answered Oliver. (*"How pink her cheek is. To kiss her would be like smelling a rose."*)

Then Betty—"Not cold a bit—the sun is so warm to-day." (*"I wonder, if he knew about mother if he—I wonder if he is as kind as he looks?"*)

Then he—"The farm is a little way off—it will take her a quarter-of-an-hour to get there at her rate." (*"If I could put my arm round her now! She seems just made for it."*)

Then there fell an uneasy silence.

"Oh!" said Betty, suddenly. She looked away from the shining water, and the wide fields below, that were all tinted with the faint duns and lilacs of early spring; then she turned round to look up at the bank behind them.

At her exclamation, Oliver looked up too. On the edge of the bank a young hawthorn tree was growing. The spring had come very early that season, and though as yet without a blossom on it, all the leaves were out. Against the intense blue sky it grew there—its colour like the fourth stone that the Prophet saw in the walls of heaven.

"Oh!" said Betty again, with a sigh of delight.

"Yes," said Oliver, quickly. *"It speaks."*

"Oh! yes, yes," called the girl, all her stiffness gone in a moment. She looked up again at the beautiful thing above them, then at him, with a sudden winning confidence, like a child that drops

its shyness, and clamours for a fairy tale. "What does it say?—you know—tell me!"

Oliver laughed. "It says—let me think, I used to know it all when I was a boy, but I've been forgetting of late. It says: 'I am young, and I am lovely, and Life is going to open all her secrets to me, and there is no end to what may happen; and see, here I am standing with my feet among the moss and violets, feeling the sun, and I can hear the birds telling me all their—most romantic!—stories——'"

He paused. "Go on," said Betty. She had turned to him, leaning her chin on the palm of her hand, her eyes wide with interest.

"There was a nightingale," he went on, "who came up the river, and sang to the moon from the big thorn over there."

"Where?" asked the girl, and he gravely pointed it out to her.

"He is very old, that thorn—you see his twisted black stem, there is wool on it, little white tufts of wool from the fleeces of the sheep, when they huddle close to it and grunt in the shade. There was a shepherd once who came on a hot day, and fell asleep under its black shadow—but that's another story. . . . The nightingale's! Ah, that *was* a story! You don't know all she told us—about her broken heart. They're almost too communicative, nightingales: they'll tell you everything—and always about themselves. The owl, now, knows a great deal more—but he——"

"Oh, go on—please, go on," said Betty. Oliver

laughed at her, and stretched his arms out along the turf, and looked down at the river. "He's very old."

"The owl?" Betty asked, almost in a whisper, showing her dimples.

"Yes; the old one. He lives in the great clipped holly in the low garden at St Julliets. Oh! he knows everything, and never tells—only now and then he hoots and cries with amusement to see the way that things are going."

"What does he know?"

"He knows more about other people, and thinks much less about himself than she (the nightingale) does. He knows how the gardener kissed Polly Jones—where the poacher trapped the hare—how the judge came home drunk at midnight—and lots of other things I couldn't tell you: country stories with a broad laugh in them!"

"And what more?"

"Well, let me see. He knows how a certain young man of his acquaintance was very much in love." Oliver glanced up at Betty under the brim of his hat, which was pulled over his eyes, but she was quite unconscious.

"Very much," he continued, "fathoms deep, in love with a beautiful girl, whom he had only seen once or twice. I think he scarcely knew her name at first. And the owl used to peer out at him, as he walked in the garden longing to see her again. Then he heard that she was coming, and he used to count up the days and

hours, and then the owl flew by his windows hooting at him. And then he saw them walking in the garden one day. Her hair was brown, and her face was turned away. He could not see much of what passed that time, because it was daylight."

"Then?" said Betty, gazing at Oliver, spell-bound.

"Oh, then—then she went away again, I think, and she nearly broke his heart, so that he couldn't sleep o' nights, and would wander about and cut her name on the trees." Oliver's face flushed, his eyes narrowed, and his voice grew very gentle, as he went on: "Then I think somehow that she came back. It was summer. The owl had just begun to preen himself to start off to catch his supper (mice) when out they came again into the garden, and he peered through the branches, and saw them go down the low walk together. She was holding her skirts up with one hand, and he saw her pretty feet, and her face was still turned away, and she was saying, 'No, no, Oliver, no.'" He paused. Betty, apparently, had not noticed the name that had slipped out.

"Go on—quick!" she said.

"Then, I think the moon must have gone behind a cloud for a minute, and she must have said something different, for when the owl softly spread his feathers and sailed out from the shadow of the bush, he was standing with his arms about her . . . and was paid for all his pain."

Oliver hid his face on his arms and laughed to himself.

"Is that all?" said Betty, with a sigh.

"Yes, that's all of that one."

"Oh! do go on."

"I don't think that I can remember any more just now."

"Ah!" said Betty, suddenly, "I remember something—I wonder if you can too. Do you remember that day so many years ago when Mrs Wentworth brought you to see us—at home" (her face fell for a moment at the word). "You began to tell me a wonderful story about gnomes. I didn't know what they were—we were interrupted—nurse called to us to come in, and I never heard the end of it. I often wondered what it was."

"Yes; I think I do remember something about it. Well, you have heard another one now. It seems to me that I can see an old square building, with black rafters, against the sky, a shadow on the grass—" he looked up at Betty, and saw that her face had changed. "There is Mrs Wentworth coming now!" he said (thinking, "She's been miserable there—or she was heart-broken about leaving it. Some day I'll take her back again . . . with bright sunlight and a bluer sky.")

Betty rose reluctantly as Mrs Wentworth appeared. The momentary shadow had passed. She looked around her with a charming expression of interest, "I am sorry to go away. It has been so delightful here. I shall imagine all sorts

of things, as we go home," she said, looking frankly into his face, and giving him her hand, as a child might do, to let him help her down the bank. "Look at the rabbits! do you know about them too?"

"Of course! It's a funny little society, timorous—in great dread of the weasel—on moonshiny nights they—but Mrs Wentworth would think me mad if she heard me talking this nonsense," said Oliver.

Mrs Wentworth smiled upon them as they came down. "I hope that you have not found the time too long," she said.

"Oh, no," Betty answered, settling herself beside her in the boat. "Indeed we did not. I have been so happy."

Oliver remembered how she had told him that she could never be happy, and he smiled to himself as he rowed. They were going with the stream now, so that he scarcely needed to touch the oars.

Betty sat looking from side to side as they glided down the shallow river. Once, as the boat passed, a pair of kingfishers flew out, brilliant, from the bank; and she looked up at Oliver as if to ask him a question. He bent his head, pulling at the oars to hide his laughter, and replied, "Nothing very interesting to you—fish and things of that sort—they live in great seclusion."

"What are you talking about?" asked Mrs Wentworth; and Oliver explained that he had been talking to Betty about the habits of birds.

"Well," said the rector, when his wife came into the study, "have you had a pleasant afternoon?"

Mrs Wentworth appeared to be depressed. She sat down, and began to pull off her gloves.

"We had a delightful day," she said. "I went into the farm, and saw the Peterkins. The old man is much better," she pulled a finger of the glove thoughtfully. "I left the young people together with the boat—it was deliciously warm. They said that they had enjoyed themselves. I was away for nearly an hour. They seemed to have been talking—about the habits of birds, Samuel!"

"Nature's marvels—very improving," said he.

"If it had even been the stars—or anything like that; but birds!" said Mrs Wentworth.

She sighed as she left the room, but she observed how bright Betty looked all that evening. She had lost more of her troubled expression than ever before.

CHAPTER XVI

ANOTHER week passed; still Oliver went almost daily to the Rectory, and Mrs Lacy grew seriously alarmed. She decided to try the effect of distracting his attention. Kathleen Rorke, the girl who had been one of Oliver's earliest admirations, whom Mrs Lacy had described after her own heart—"Not too clever, or too good-looking, or too pious, or sarcastic, or anything,"—had been staying in the neighbourhood along with her mother, and she determined to see if the moderate charms of this young woman would cure her son of his present infatuation for Betty.

The Rorkes were invited, and came accordingly on the following week. Oliver had not seen Kathleen since she was a girl of sixteen, with what he called "a delightful mane of hair." He had not the least wish to see her now. He wished them both at Jericho; an older guest would not have mattered, but the introduction of a third young person was the last thing that he wanted.

When he first saw Kathleen again he thought that she was plain; the mane of hair had, of course, been rolled up. The next time that he looked at her he thought her pretty; and by the

time that she had been two days in the house he felt it was a matter of no importance, because no one cared to consider, in looking at her perfectly frank, expressive face, whether it was pretty or not—its entire charm lay in expression.

She arrived at St Julliets, therefore, an unwelcome presence—except to Mrs Lacy, who received her warmly. But in the course of a week Oliver found out that, whatever she was, she was not the sort of neutral piece of propriety that he had imagined. Betty, always shy with strangers, felt particularly so with girls of her own age; but there was something about Kathleen's cheerful friendliness that put her at her ease immediately. Mrs Lacy had overlooked the fact that Miss Rorke had a sense of humour. It acted like a charm in the situation in which she found herself on her first arrival, for she very soon perceived that she was, to Oliver, very much in the way. He did not want to go out with her; he did not want to have anything to do with her, in short; and she was perfectly aware of the fact. However, there was no help for it, as the three young people were necessarily obliged to go about together; and so, in the easiest way in the world, Kathleen contrived to establish an unspoken understanding on the subject. She sketched—or, at any rate, carried a sketch book—and Mrs Lacy would have felt still more uneasy than she did, could she have seen how frequently she sat sketching by herself—laughing sometimes over her paper—with Oliver

and Betty somewhere out of earshot. The consequence was that both of them began to like to have her with them. Oliver, perhaps, knew the real state of the case, but Betty was perfectly unconscious; only delighted that she should find herself "getting on" so well with another girl. She felt as if Kathleen were much older than herself, although in reality there was a very small difference in age between them. She used often to look at her kind, expressive face, wishing that she could understand her history without the telling. Kathleen spoke often of her own mother, who was not in good health, and spent most of the time in her own room, only appearing late in the day; a gentle fragile woman, with a sweet smile, like her daughter's; one of those amiable people who like everyone. She considered Mrs Lacy "a charming woman, and such a devoted mother." Kathleen's quick perceptions very soon made her aware that there was something in the background of Betty's life that cast a shadow. "She is the loveliest creature I've ever seen—but why does she look so sad?" she said to Oliver.

"It is—perhaps the shape of her eyebrows," he answered doubtfully, not himself having any idea of the cause of Betty's tragic expression.

One day, when Oliver was not at home, the two girls had gone out by themselves. They had walked to one of the neighbouring villages, and were on their way home. Betty had been talking gaily, till they turned a corner of the road,

and came quite suddenly upon two people—a woman, who lay back against the bank at the roadside, and a little girl about ten years old, who was bending over her, pulling and shaking her by turns, calling out in a shrill voice, “Come along! Come along with you now!” As Betty and Kathleen came in sight, she turned round to look at them with a brassy, unchildlike stare. She was a mishriven, sharp-faced creature, dressed in cheap, townified clothes. The mother, a middle-aged woman, in a rusty widow’s bonnet, had evidently fallen on the road, for her black garments were coated with dust. She lolled her head to one side and grinned as the child again called in her ear, “Get up, mother! come now!”

“Dear me, how horrible!” said Kathleen. Then stepping up to them, she asked the child if her mother was ill.

The little girl surveyed her with a quick glance. “No, she ain’t ill no more nor I am—*it’s drink*. She won’t get up”; here she gave her mother another shove. “And ’ow we’re to get ’ome to-night I don’t know. We’ll miss the train unless she’ll come on now.” She bent down again. “Get up, you——! I wonder yer not ashamed of yerself!” The woman flapped at her feebly with one black-gloved hand, and sank back again against the primrose-starred bank.

“Let us go on. We can do nothing, I’m afraid,” Kathleen began; but Betty came up to the child.

“Don’t speak to your mother that way; it will

do no good," she said. "Will you run along the lane to the field at the top. There is a man in it with a cart; I saw him as we passed. Give him this"—she handed her some money—"and tell him you want him to drive your mother to the station. We will stay here till you come back." The child snapped her hand over the coin, and, without another word, with a quick comprehensive nod, ran off to the corner of the lane. The two girls stood in silence, looking down at the woman beside them.

Kathleen heard Betty draw a long breath, and was startled by her pale, set face. "Are you frightened?" she asked, in a low voice.

Betty shook her head. "No—*hurt*," she answered, suddenly putting her hand on her heart for a moment.

"Go away—go away; you are ill. I will stay here," said Kathleen; but Betty would not go.

In a few minutes they heard the rumble of a cart; it appeared round the corner, the little girl sitting on the edge beside the farm man who drove it, her thin legs dangling, talking in her high key. "Drunk's a hog—that's all. She ain't ill a bit—see," she jumped down and shook her mother. "Come along now, get up!"

Betty moved forward and helped the woman to her feet. The man unconcernedly hunched her into the cart. "Have you got money enough to take you home?" Betty asked the unattractive child.

She quickly produced two railway tickets.

"Get 'ome all right now, an' thank you," she called, climbing into the cart. "She's hoften worse nor this." She nodded gaily to them as the cart rolled off, sitting chewing the corner of a railway ticket, and looking at them with her hard, fixed stare.

Betty and Kathleen walked on for a few paces in silence; then, when the cart was out of sight, Betty sank down on the bank as pale as death. "You are ill, dear! Oh! what is the matter?" said Kathleen.

"I'm all right; I can walk on immediately—only let us sit here for a minute or two; don't let us walk behind them any longer," Betty answered; and Kathleen, sitting down beside her, laid her hand kindly on her knee.

They sat without speaking, till the sound of the cart died away. It was a narrow green lane, and on the high banks the yellow primroses grew so thick that they made the whole air sweet. The clear sky was full of a steady peace, flushing towards evening, without the shadow of a cloud.

Kathleen looked up at Betty, and saw that she was crying—without a sob or a sound—the large tears fell from her eyes one by one, dropping on her knee. She never raised her hand, even to wipe them away, or to hide her face. The unconsciousness of great misery made her heedless of any onlooker.

She put her hand out presently and pulled a primrose, looked at it vacantly, and then threw

it away. "Is your trouble past help, Betty?" asked Kathleen, softly, adding, "I've had trouble of my own, though no one seems to imagine it."

Betty turned to her with a look of dreamy surprise. "Have you?" she said. "I should never have thought so."

"Well, it's long ago now," said Kathleen; her bright face had changed for a moment. "It's over, and I've begun again, Betty. Can't you do that?"

"No; *mine is alive*," said Betty, in a hoarse whisper. Then she pulled her hat down over her eyes, and they got up and began to walk homewards, Betty still holding Kathleen's hand in hers.

CHAPTER XVII

THE next morning Mrs Lacy did not appear at breakfast. She summoned Oliver, who came dutifully at once, making indifferent inquiries about her health, thinking all the time what a sweet morning it was, and how soon he could go down to the Rectory. Mrs Lacy detained him with half-a-dozen elaborate little messages and arrangements. "And I should like you to see Carter yourself this morning, and explain to him *exactly* what I wish"—Oliver groaned inwardly, well knowing how impossible it was for anyone ever to execute any of his mother's errands exactly as she wished—"if you have nothing particular to do this morning," she added.

"I promised the rector——" Oliver began.

Mrs Lacy did not wait to hear what he had promised. She settled herself amongst her pillows, and fixed her eyes on her son. "Sit down, Oliver; I want to talk to you." Oliver obeyed, sitting with his eyes on the pile of small devotional books with which Mrs Lacy surrounded herself at that hour of the morning.

"I do not want to annoy you by what I say, Oliver," she began, in what he called her "butter and honey" voice; "but I feel that it is my duty as a mother to remind you that I hope you will

not, just for the sake of a little amusement, raise expectations which you must be aware you cannot fulfil." Mrs Lacy was very fond of a well-turned sentence, and rolled this one under her tongue with considerable satisfaction.

After an instant's silence Oliver looked up at her, "Which, in plain English, means that you do not wish me to marry Miss Musgrave?"

Mrs Lacy preserved a smiling composure. "My dear, I never said anything of the kind; you are too old now for me to think of interfering in any such matter." (She said this as if it implied the greatest self-abnegation on her part.) "I would scarcely offer you my advice, only that, in this case, I was looking at it entirely from the girl's point of view, if your intentions, to put it plainly, are not very serious——"

"If they are?"

"If they are—well, then, I have only to ask you, as a special favour to me, to take some little time to think over it—to consider the position."

"She mightn't have me—if I asked her."

Mrs Lacy settled a ruffle at her neck, with a smile of quiet satisfaction. "I don't think *that* is very likely."

Oliver agreed with his mother in the main. Brought up in a world that had always flattered and made much of him, as yet his self-esteem had never really suffered a serious check. If he did not say outright, "Thank heaven, I am not as other men, unjust, adulterers, extortioners," he would have felt that he could at anyrate look back upon

his own conduct without any bitter condemnation. Betty's cold, rather incisive manner might mean a rebuff the first time, but he did not think that she would mean it at the bottom of her heart.

"All I ask of you," his mother went on, "is that you will take a little time to consider. Time can do no harm. Wait until you know her better before you say anything to her. You have never even seen her mother. You do not know in the very least to what sort of people she belongs."

"I do not care."

"Well, promise me you will not be in a hurry."

"Very well—all right," Oliver gave a reluctant promise, adding, "What do you mean by a hurry, though?"

"Ah," she considered, and added, "Not for a fortnight, anyway."

"You mean not while she is here."

"Well, I'll alter that, and say not at least until you have *seen* her mother."

"Oh, very well—perhaps that's prudence after all—though I don't see what difference it will make."

He turned away, glad to be done of the argument, and Mrs Lacy relapsed amongst her pillows breathing more freely. "Time is always gain," she said to herself. "He's so fickle, and she can't stay at the Rectory very much longer now."

Oliver went off to the Rectory immediately. The door was open, so he walked into the drawing-room unannounced, hoping to find Betty

there. There she was, standing dressed in her outdoor things, and looking very pale. The rector with his spectacles pushed high on his forehead was looking up a time bill. "Ah, Oliver, good morning," he said, when the young man entered. "Your eyes are sharper than mine, look up this for the train to town. We've had bad news this morning," he added, patting Betty's hand; "Miss Musgrave has to leave us at once."

"I trust it is nothing very serious. Is your mother ill?" Oliver asked, anxiously. Betty's lips were quivering. She handed him a telegram that lay on the table, "Come home at once. Mrs Musgrave arrived last night."

"I hope she is not ill," the girl managed to say. The rector slipped the time bill into Oliver's hand, saying that he must go and tell his wife to make haste, for he heard the carriage coming to the door.

"Is no one going with you? Can you go alone?" asked Oliver, longing to offer to go himself.

"Mr Wentworth wanted to come," Betty answered; "but I would rather not have him with me. It is a short journey—I do not mind going alone."

"If I might—" began Oliver; but he saw from Betty's manner that she did not wish him to say anything more. He stood by her, smitten into a sudden awkward sympathetic silence. Why had he been fool enough to give that promise to his mother half-an-hour ago? Now, when

the girl was going away, alone, and in trouble, he felt that he could say nothing, for fear of betraying himself altogether.

Mr Wentworth had gone to call his wife. She was putting on her bonnet to drive with Betty to the station.

"Oliver is downstairs," he remarked.

"Well — stay here!" called Mrs Wentworth, hastily.

"Oh yes ; I've left them alone. But there is the carriage coming, my dear."

Mrs Wentworth slowly untied the strings of her bonnet, and began to make a fresh bow.

"Once more," said the rector, "and then you must come down—if you mean Betty to go by this train."

"She ought to go," admitted Mrs Wentworth. She opened a drawer, and with much deliberation selected a pair of gloves, then turned to her husband, "Couldn't we give them a few minutes longer, Samuel?"

"Well, the London train won't wait for Oliver's proposal."

"I suppose I must go down," she said at last. "Or could I send him with her to the station?"

"Hardly, I think ; come now!" said the rector, who looked as sad as herself.

When they came down Betty was standing making a note of the trains that Oliver had found for her in the time bill.

"It's correct! It's hopeless!" said the rector to himself. They all went to the door together.

Betty shook hands with Oliver, and held up her cheek to the rector to be kissed. The carriage drove off, and the two men stood together at the door, each with a singularly blank expression of face.

Mrs Wentworth said little to the girl as they drove to the station. When they stood waiting for the train she took both of Betty's hands, and looked into her face. "Good-bye, my child. Remember, Betty, that God knows everything. In all the troubles of life there are only two that can really help you—God and yourself; the sooner you learn to trust the one, and depend on the other, the better for you."

CHAPTER XVIII

WITH a sinking heart, late in the foggy evening, Betty came up the steps at Mrs Pomfret's door. All the freshness of spring had been left behind her it seemed; she felt as if London had engulfed her like a muddy, roaring sea. "Is Mrs Musgrave here?" she asked, in a trembling voice, when Mrs Pomfret opened the door.

"Oh yes, miss. She arrived quite sudden yesterday afternoon, and walked from I don't know where; hurt her arm, too——" She detained Betty at the door, talking almost in a whisper, "Nothin' much, miss—'ad slipped and fallen; she was real bad in the evenin' though, and I feels I must send and bring you home."

"Yes, thank you; you did quite right," said Betty.

"She's in the parlour now," said Mrs Pomfret.

Betty went in. The fire was low, the room all in a litter; a paraffin lamp, with its green shade pushed awry, shed a harsh glare; Mrs Musgrave sat huddled up in a shawl. Her face was pale and haggard, with purple circles beneath the eyes. She did not even look round as the door opened; her whole attitude bespoke a hopeless dejection. At the sight of her sitting there, hopeless and

forlorn, there entered like iron into the girl's soul the knowledge of the futile struggle of a weak will to stand against the overmastering force of evil desire—that has triumphed, and will triumph—till seventy times seven.

She came up quietly, laying a hand on her mother's shoulder, "Well, mother, here I am, come back to look after you—you haven't been much hurt, I hope?"

Mrs Musgrave turned her heavy eyes upon her, without responding to her caress.

"Not much—my arm is hurt."

"Why did you come? Was it necessary for you to leave the . . . house?" Betty asked.

Her mother pushed her hair from her forehead with a weary gesture, then said suddenly, "I ran away!"—giving a short hoarse laugh at the words; "I couldn't stand it any longer!"

"Oh, mother—it was doing you good."

"No, no—nothing will do me good, Betty." She laid a dry, hot hand over Betty's, speaking with the same low, hoarse voice. "Nothing will do me good. *I must have it.* I'd walk from here to Dover to smell the cork that comes out of a brandy bottle."

"Don't—don't—Oh, mother!"

"Well—it's as well to tell you. I can't do more than I've done—"("What has she done?" thought the girl.) Haven't I prayed and entreated the Lord!—but to be shut up in a house like that, with a herd of common women—I couldn't bear it! You ought never to have asked

me to—that a person brought up as I have been should be subjected to insult, and prying inquiry, from a vulgar, half-educated woman calling herself a matron—as if I were a lunatic! not even allowed to go out and post a letter!”

Betty sat silent, with her lips compressed. “You are pale, Betty,” called her mother, looking at her. “My precious child, have they not been good to you? Of course, you ought not to have been allowed to go and stay with torpid old people like the Wentworths—you must have suffered—you need young life about you—all young people do.”

She insisted now that Betty should lie down upon the sofa, saying that she saw she was “worn out.” She covered her up, and then lowered the lamp, and told her to try to sleep, all the time walking about the room with her heavy step, every now and then making some sudden movement that would entirely have prevented the girl from sleeping even had she been so inclined.

Betty closed her eyes, and lay still—every pulse in her head throbbed. She heard her mother go out of the room, and then tried to think, but she felt that her sense of hearing was sharpened to the point of suffering, as if all the hideous, ceaseless tumult of the London streets beat upon her brain. Was she never going to have a moment of quiet again! How dreadful this stir and noise was! How did people ever manage to live, or get one calm instant in which to die, in a noise like this.

She started up on the sofa when Mrs Pomfret came into the room. The woman looked at her pale face, pitying her, then lowering her voice, and assuming the half-defiant expression that working people often use when they must defend their own interests, she began: "I just came in to speak to you, miss."

Betty waited, knowing in her heart what she had come to say. "It's no use," Mrs Pomfret continued, "I'd do all I could for you, miss, and if it were only myself I'd keep 'er gladly enough, and stand the consequences; but, miss, I've got my boys to eddicate—and me a widow—and if my best rooms is empty what am I to do? The two ladies on the first floor gave up their rooms this mornin'. Couldn't stand a scene like last night's (when she came 'ome) again. She——"

"Yes, yes, Mrs Pomfret. I understand that it is impossible for us to stay here any longer," Betty answered, in a low, weary voice. Mrs Pomfret came and sat down on the sofa beside her, whispering. It made Betty hold up her head with a start—this was a new humiliation—that her affairs should have to be whispered about like servant's gossip.

"Now, miss—you cheer up a bit—I've been thinkin' it over, and makin' inquiries, and I know just the place for you. It's with Mrs Trevoze. *She'll take anyone*; she's kind, and she's not too particular, and none of her lodgers will care what happens. She kept a lady"—here she glanced at the door mysteriously—"kept a lady worse nor

her, for four and a 'af years, till she 'ad to go for fits—took them at table,—but that's the only one as ever I heard of bein' sent away."

"Who is Mrs Trevose?" Betty asked. She felt sick and dull. How far away—what years away!—was yesterday already.

"She's John's wife's sister—married to a Cornishman, miss—'e was a bad 'un." She paused on a reminiscence; "but now he's gone she's quite cheery. You'll find her always pleasant to do with, miss—they all likes Mrs Trevose."

When Betty, the next morning, told her mother as gently as she could that they must leave the house, as Mrs Pomfret wanted the rooms, it led, as she had feared, to a violent explosion of temper.

"I'll leave your house to-morrow—you are not worthy to have a lady under your roof," Mrs Musgrave called out, as the woman was leaving the room.

Betty spoke to her afterwards alone. She got Mrs Trevose's address from her, and asked about her terms. She knew that they must now take much cheaper rooms, for Mrs Pomfret, out of kindness, had let hers to them at a considerable reduction. But Mrs Trevose's terms seemed to be elastic. "It will be all right, miss. I've seen her—go and see," said Mrs Pomfret. So the girl set out that very afternoon. It was a mild, muggy day, with drizzling rain and slimy streets. Betty stood on the edge of the pavement waiting for a 'bus, when she found herself accosted by Mr Smythe. Some feeling, or the damp air, made his face

unusually red, as he greeted her in his effusive manner. Betty looked at him with unseeing eyes, answering his remarks in a dry, hard voice.

"I hope to have the pleasure of calling on you very soon again," he said.

"We are leaving the rooms that we are in now," said Betty; "and I do not yet know our new address."

"Ah, leaving your present rooms—your mother keeps pretty well, I hope?" He peered into her face.

"She is quite well, thank you."

"Had a slight accident, I understand—I happened to call before you came home—yesterday—and I saw her for a few moments. Oh! here is your 'bus. Mustn't take things too much to heart, my dear, or you will lose your roses." He pressed her hand as he helped her into the 'bus.

Betty's cheeks never flushed. She took her seat by the door, and gazed hard at the honest, cheerful face of the conductor, as if to shut out the recollection of Mr Smythe's gallant air.

CHAPTER XIX

THE name "Trevoſe" waſ inſcribed upon the dirty doorplate: the drip from a broken rone falling into the hollowed doorſtone, had formed a puddle upon the threshold; as Betty entered the houſe ſhe nearly ſtumbled over a torn mat in the paſſage. She waſ ſhown into a ſitting-room, where a fat woman, with an elastic ſtep, roſe to greet her, ſmiling.

"Are you Mrs Trevoſe? Mrs Pomfret recommended me to come here," Betty began, feeling ſomewhat embarrassed by the preſence of two Asiatic-looking youths who were playing cards at a ſide table.

"Step into t' ante drawin'-room, Miſſ Muſgrave," the woman replied: with a glance at the two young men, ſhe added, "t'ey're juſt havin' a *quiet* game—it's Saturday afternoon, you ſee, and t'ey get out of t' offices early. Take a ſeat, Miſſ Muſgrave, pleaſe."

Betty ſat down, and looked at her. Mrs Trevoſe waſ a ſhort woman, ſmall-boned, and very agile for her ſize. She had neat features, and a kindly eye; her hands, for a woman of her claſs, were remarkably ſmall, and had they been clean, would have been extremely pretty. Her whole perſon and clothing had a greaſy

look, as if well oiled. She had a curious habit of adding a *t* to her words; but she made the most commonplace remark interesting by the liveliness and fervour of her intonation. "T'ey're *small* rooms," she said, in reply to Betty's questions, "but *scrupulously* clean." (Betty wondered). "Or I could give you t' large room—double bed—furnished with t' *utmost* luxury—per'aps you'll come up and see t'em for yourself?" She conducted Betty along a dark passage, up three flights of stairs, and showed her a couple of tiny bedrooms, one of which had a skylight window: the beds in both were unmade, and the space was scarcely large enough to turn round in.

"Oh! these will never do," said the girl.

"T' large bedroom would be more suitable, I'm thinkin'," gaily responded the landlady. They went downstairs again, this time into a good-sized bedroom. The carpet was stained, and everything in the room was grimy, but the window faced south. There was a fireplace, a wardrobe, and some floor space.

Betty, knowing that they could not afford to have a private sitting-room, said something to Mrs Trevoise about the drawing-room.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "T'it's *quite a happy fam'ly life* we have—not like t' common boardin'-houses—t' *sanctuary of home*, and all t' advantages of t' 'igh society, Miss Musgrave. We have several people of t' best connections in t'is house."

While they stood on the landing a door beside them opened, and a child came running out. She

was a little thing, about five years old, with a round, waxy face, dressed in a frock of unsuitable material, heavily trimmed with cotton lace. The most striking thing about her was her hair: it hung down in long, unwholesome, artificial ringlets, nearly to her knees. At sight of Mrs Trevoise, she ran straight to her, and catching hold of one of her small, greasy hands, she kissed it fondly, clinging to her skirts.

"Come down with me, Bébé, and I'll give you a muffin and cream," said the woman. Betty noted the extreme kindliness of her manner, and understood why the child seemed so fond of her. As she went hopping off down the stairs in front of them, Mrs Trevoise whispered in the girl's ear, "Who would t'ink t'at that little darlin' was connected with one of t' *'ighest* fam'lies in t' kingdom—on t' *wrong* side of t' blanket," she added, suggestively.

Betty did not know what to say. When they came again into the sitting-room, seeing that they were now alone, she turned to Mrs Trevoise, her face growing pale with the effort. "I think," she said, "I ought to tell you, that I am very anxious that Mrs Musgrave should have nothing to excite her, she—she——" faltering in her speech, Betty fumbled with her card case, and stood silent.

"Dear! dear!" exclaimed Mrs Trevoise, with the utmost intelligence. "I *perfectly* understand" (her intonation conveyed a world of comprehension). "Mrs Pomfret dropped me t' hint, dear!

... Trevoze himself had t' artistic nature—I know well what that means! T'ere's no fear of her here, dear! All t' boarders have t'eyre own wine at table, and I'm t' strict teetotaler myself." She laid a kind hand on Betty's arm. "You must keep up your heart, miss. T'it's *often* t' effect of bereavement on t' 'igh strung dispositions; entertaining society's t' best cure!"

The kindness of her manner warmed even Betty's chilled heart. She arranged to take the room at the price named—an easy one,—and went away.

When she went out "t' little darlin'" was standing by the door, the tips of her worn shoes dipped in the puddle, eating a muffin spread with cream. Betty was fond of children, and drew her hand softly over the child's round cheek as she passed, saying, "Good-bye, little girl." The little thing kissed her hand to her with an affected bow, the cream meanwhile streaming over her grimy fingers.

Betty went slowly down the worn steps, and tock her way home. It seemed unbelievable, dreamlike, that she—she—should be going to descend into such a household as that of Mrs Trevoze.

Her early upbringing and surroundings had made her a creature as utterly alien from that sort of life, as if she had dropped from the moon. It would have seemed to her not a bit more surprising, perhaps scarcely less disagreeable, to have stepped down, inch by inch, into some stagnant pond, until the filth and slime had reached her lips.

As she went along she recalled Mrs Wentworth's last words to her, wondering vaguely within herself what "help from God" might mean. It was like telling a drowning man to catch hold of a rainbow. Her aunt had given her in childhood a very strict religious upbringing, according to the old Scottish school of religion, and often in her trouble Betty had tried to pray. But it seemed no use. She had a nature that could cherish no illusions, and now avowed to herself with the utmost candour that one good friend would be worth to her all her ideas of God put together. How she wished that she could have told Mrs Wentworth the truth about her mother. Often it had trembled on her lips, and yet she had never been able to say it. The next time that she saw her Betty resolved that she would be frank, and tell her everything. Would she tell Oliver? What would he think? And at the thought of Oliver, with an overwhelming force, the flood of her thoughts rushed back to St Julliets. "I should like to try to make you happy," he had said. She repeated it in her heart, and it seemed as if the weight of her trouble were lightened a little—as if she could still see in the distance a ray of light.

CHAPTER XX

"HE can write, Samuel."

"Oh yes; he can."

"Do you think he will?"

"If he is a wise man, I think not."

"Do you think that he will go up to town and see her there?"

"If Mrs Lacy does not prevent it I think that he will."

"Ah! she can't prevent it, if things have gone as far as that," said Mrs Wentworth, well satisfied.

This was Saturday. On Sunday Oliver came to church along with his mother and Miss Rorke. He sat, during the sermon, with his yellow head bent, as if listening profoundly. On the way home he and Kathleen walked together. Oliver would not talk. At last Kathleen turned to him.

"I am so anxious to hear about Miss Musgrave," she said. "I asked Mrs Wentworth. She has had no letter yet. I do hope that she did not find her mother ill."

"I think of going to town to-morrow," said Oliver. He looked up at Kathleen quickly, as if to ask for her opinion. She smiled frankly back at him as she gave it.

"Yes, do go; go to-morrow. Don't wait another day," she answered.

She listened with amusement, when Mrs Lacy joined them, and Oliver announced that he was going to town on Monday. Mrs Lacy gave no sign of disapprobation; her dress only rustled a little more than usual, as if the agitation she concealed, had got itself into the fabric. She said, "Very well."

When Oliver was alone after lunch, she came into the library, wearing her most resolute and benignant air. He knew what to expect whenever he saw her face.

"I thought that I ought to tell you," she began, as she seated herself beside him, "before you go to town to-morrow, what decision I have come to, in the event of your utterly disregarding my wishes about the subject that we discussed the other day."

"Dear me! what a long sentence. No; you needn't repeat it, mother. After a moment's reflection, I quite understand what you mean."

"That is all right then, Oliver." Mrs Lacy opened her lips and then closed them silently, as was her habit when she was not very well pleased. It had something the effect of composing the mouth to utter "prunes and prisms," and, since his boyhood, had had an irritating effect upon her son. He waited now for her to speak, wishing to keep her in good humour.

"My dear Oliver," she continued, in her smothering way, "you know that you and I have always lived on the best of terms. I have lived almost entirely for you. You have been my chief

thought always, and now when I see you about to enter on a course of action that I regard with the strongest disapproval," — Oliver sighed impatiently — "I feel that it is my duty to remind you of something that I would scarcely have thought of alluding to in any other circumstance."

"And that is, mother?"

He was standing by the fireplace looking down at her. Again Mrs Lacy opened her lips and closed them without a word, then looked up at him with a pleasant smile.

"That all the money belongs to me," she said, continuing to smile blandly on him.

A deep, slow flush gathered on Oliver's face. He waited in silence until it had died down again, then looked at his mother. "Yes, mother; I had forgotten that. But as we have been saying plain truths to one another, I may as well tell you, that rather than be dictated to by you as to the sort of woman I am or am not to marry; rather than have the feeling, in short, that I'd chosen my wife to suit you instead of myself, I'd leave home to-morrow and go and live like a clerk on forty pounds a year—and I would do it too—but," he added, "I'm not a fool. I see that, of course, I ought to respect your wishes up to a certain point, and I will do so. I tell you as plainly as I can, if I am in love with a girl, whoever she is—though she were the dairy-maid—I'll marry her whether you like or not." He kept looking down into her face as he spoke.

"But, in this case, if it will please you, I will not do anything in a hurry. I'll delay any reasonable time you like. I'll get to know the girl and her uttermost connections down to the third and fourth generation, if that will please you; but I'll do as I choose."

Mrs Lacy, with a short sigh, rose rustling from her low chair. "My dear boy," she said, patting her son's arm; "don't suppose anything, except that I wish to keep you from taking a too hasty step. I have nothing to say against the girl; she seems well principled, and, when she has a good colour, she is decidedly pretty; and I suppose she is a lady."

"Are you quite sure?" said Oliver, whose sarcasm was wasted on Mrs Lacy.

"Well, I must say that I saw nothing unlady-like in her behaviour—but Mrs Wentworth says that the mother is peculiar."

She left the room, and Oliver stood looking down, deep in thought. That one irritating little sentence had now worn itself into his brain.

"Mrs Wentworth says that the mother is peculiar."

CHAPTER XXI

"I'M not going to town after all," said Oliver to Kathleen the next morning. She looked surprised. "My mother doesn't want me to go to-day, so I've put it off for a week or two to please her." Kathleen said nothing; in her heart she thought none the better of him. But Oliver, when in good humour, was a most entertaining companion, and for her own sake she was glad not to be left alone with Mrs Lacy.

Betty wrote to Mrs Wentworth the day before she left Mrs Pomfret's. She did not give her new address, she could not quite have said why. She thought that after she had become accustomed to living at Mrs Trevese's it might not seem so bad, but just at first she felt as if she could not bear that anyone (she did not even to herself say Oliver) should see her there in that house.

To Betty's amazement, Mrs Musgrave, on her part, was wonderfully well-pleased with their change of residence. The former lodgings, though eminently clean and respectable, had been dull with the unrelieved dulness of genteel poverty. She and Betty, with no friends in town, had nothing beyond their own small errands, to take them out; and they used to spend long dreary hours

together in the evening. But at Mrs Trevose's, their means were now so much reduced that they could no longer afford a private sitting-room. They were obliged to have their meals along with the other boarders, and afterwards, if they did not choose to sit upstairs, had to go into the drawing-room. All Mrs Musgrave's finer feelings were blunted now, her wish for any distraction was keener than ever, so that, to her daughter's dismay, she found the society at Mrs Trevose's quite congenial.

In one way Betty felt only too glad to see her amused by anything, but it filled her with pained astonishment. She could scarcely believe her eyes when she saw her mother talking to the faded lady calling herself "Madam Marchand," who, at first, Betty thought was Bébé's mother.

Mrs Trevose however explained to her that Bébé was not her child. "She's had t' charge of her since her birth, dear!" she said, and, waving her little greasy hand expressively, "We all make our *little slips* at one time or another, dear! Her own wee darlin' died you see—(a fragile flower!) and t' is little creature has just taken t' place in t' mother's heart."

"Who was her husband?" Betty asked.

Mrs Trevose turned an eye upon her. "T' its best to let bygones be bygones, dear. T' old memories are best undisturbed. T' married state's not *always* t' happiest. T' price of t' virtuous woman is *above rubies*, as Solomon says. We mustn't be *too hard* on one another, dear." Betty's face grew

crimson, and the next time that she found herself beside Madam Marchand, she instinctively turned away, being ashamed of her feeling the moment she had done so, when she had looked at her. A woman she was, who had once been beautiful, with a rich, gentle type of beauty, but whom life and Heaven knows what sad experience had so wasted down, and melted away, that she looked like a wax doll that has been held too near the fire. Even Betty's acrid young virtue was softened by the languor and gentleness and the extreme sorrow in her face; after the first shock of bringing her pride to speak to her she came to regard her with liking. At first, the Asiatic-looking young men were so much afraid of the girl, that her presence cast a gloom over the table. But when the party had been added to by a thoroughly respectable German, who had failed as a singer, and now supported herself by teaching music; and a Jewish woman with an undoubted husband and a son, Betty's shyness and coldness became less noticeable.

Mrs Levison the Jewess was a very kind person, richly dressed, the husband belonging to the type, described by the Frenchman, who "did not wash, but used plenty of eau de Cologne"; the son, a black-browed young man, full of European aspirations. Mrs Levison was very kind to Betty according to her lights. She used to sit beside her after dinner, and talk about dress, of which she was inordinately fond, and often would call Betty into her room to display her flower-gardens of hats, or new dresses. Betty soon grew more

or less accustomed to all these people, even to the stray boarders—strange figures of various kinds, who drifted in amongst them for a few days, or weeks, and then disappeared. Betty's seat at table was on Mrs Trevose's right hand; she soon began to depend upon her more than she knew—indeed, it was the irresistible good-humour and kindness of Mrs Trevose that alone made the place endurable to her. When Mrs Musgrave was restless, the good woman soothed her by adroit flattery. She coaxed her to eat, or to exert herself, when threatened with one of her fits of depression, and exercised at all times an exhilarating influence. "'T'its just t' fatigue, dear: an hour of repose will *completely* restore t' jaded system," she would exclaim, gently dissuading her from starting on one of those long lonely rambles, that Betty had learnt so much to dread.

As the weeks went on, and hot weather came, the girl began to suffer in health from the close air, and the anxiety that she had undergone.

One hot day in June she sat by the window that looked into the small back garden—a place that might have been haunted by ghouls—where the sparse grass had long since been worn away, and a few hens picked up a precarious livelihood under a wire netting at the other end. They supplied the breakfast-table with dingy, tasteless eggs. "Try a *fresh new laid* egg, dear," Mrs Trevose would say, in a tone that, for a moment, invested them with country charm. Betty had been sitting by the window for a long time,

wishing that she felt strong enough to go out and walk, when Mrs Levison, gorgeous in her apparel, and wearing all her ornaments, came sailing into the room. She began, with some diffidence, to say that a friend had lent her her carriage for the afternoon, and that she felt sure that Miss Musgrave would be the better of a drive—would she come out with her for an hour? She moistened her red lips, and dabbed at the pink powder on her face nervously as she spoke.

“Who am I to be so proud?” thought Betty bitterly; so she thanked her, and said that she would come. She had not taken into account that young Levison, having “a day off” that afternoon, would accompany his mother. He stood at the door, a study in black and yellow, with a glittering hat in his hand, as the girl came downstairs. She tried to direct her conversation chiefly to his mother as they drove. But Mrs Levison having come to enjoy the sight of her fellow-creatures, was not disposed for conversation, so the young man had it all his own way. He leaned forward to gaze into Betty’s face, or lolled back to twist his finger rings. The girl grew more and more uncomfortable. She had not an adaptable nature, and could not conceal her annoyance. They were driving slowly through the Park when, as she turned her face away from young Levison’s too expressive gaze, she suddenly caught sight of Oliver Lacy standing by the railings close beside her.

All Betty's face was flooded in an instant with soft colour. She bowed to him coldly, and did not look again. The situation which a moment before had been merely annoying, was now become intolerable. She was subject always to very quick and acute change of feeling. Now she could have jumped out of the carriage, and made her way through the people, holding out her hands to him, and crying :—" I can trust you. I am miserable. Oh ! take me away with you—away from these horrible surroundings," and yet instead, she only succeeded in giving him a cold recognition, and one glance from her anguished blue eyes that made Oliver suddenly shiver.

" Good Heavens ! " he said to himself, as he turned and walked away. " There she is, and she never looked twice at me ; and who on earth is that she's driving with—can *that* be the mother."

Betty scarcely heard young Levison's remarks on the way home. When they got back to the house she ran upstairs to her own room, and flung herself into a chair, pressing her hands over her eyes. " Why is he in town without coming to see me ? " she thought. Then, remembering that she had not given Mrs Wentworth her new address, she gave a gasp of thankfulness. " He won't come here, at least ! Ah ! but Mrs Pomfret, if he goes there, will tell him. Will he come to see me here ? And see mother—and these people ! " She felt her cheeks burning, even as she sat alone ; then she stretched out her two

hands, and spoke aloud, as if to some one in the room. "Oh! I—if I loved anyone—would mind nothing—my love would be as clean of other interests as God's love to us is." She remembered that Oliver had made a movement forwards as if to speak to her. Why had she not stopped the carriage? But it was too late now.

Oliver had come to town the day before. He had dutifully waited till the Rorkes left St Julliot's, and then, a week later, feeling that he had more than fulfilled his promise of delay, had gone the very day he got to town to call on Betty. Mrs Pomfret, when she saw him, had expressed a complete ignorance as to where Miss Musgrave had gone.

"May I be forgiven!" she said afterwards; "but to 'ave a gentleman like that see my young lady at Mrs Trevo's is more nor I could stand."

Oliver therefore had come away baffled, and now he had let his opportunity slip, and what was he to do. How could he manage to see her. How thin she looked! How the expression in her eyes had pierced his heart. He lay awake that night cursing his own folly in ever having promised his mother to delay in putting his fate to the touch. Then, again, with rapid reaction, came the realisation of what it would mean to him to quarrel with her—how the whole peace of his life would be destroyed. He would wait. He would be patient for a little longer, and in

time Mrs Wentworth would know Betty's address.

So he tossed and questioned with his heart in the darkness, and all the clocks in London seemed to strike the hours.

CHAPTER XXII

OLIVER went back to St Julliets in a very dissatisfied frame of mind. Shortly afterwards Mrs Wentworth wrote to Betty—a letter forwarded by Mrs Pomfret; and the girl, in replying to it, could no longer conceal her present address. “Oliver Lacy tells me,” wrote the old lady, “that he went to call upon you when he was in town last week; I had hoped to hear all about you on his return, but he says that the woman at your former lodgings had not got your present address. I am sending this now, trusting that by this time she will be able to forward it.” Betty heeded very little of the other contents of the letter. “He did come after all,” she thought; “he wanted to see me then,” and again she drew a deep breath of relief in thinking that he had not seen her in her present surroundings. She had some misgivings in letting even Mrs Wentworth know her address; but having heard that Oliver had returned, she thought that it was safe enough. Her heart was light all day after getting the letter. “He came, he came,” she repeated, and even the recollection of their casual meeting in the Park became less painful. He had not forgotten, at least.

That evening Betty was a trifle late for dinner.

When she entered the dining-room everyone else was seated. There was a great clatter of dishes, and noise of talking. The girl came quickly down the whole length of the room. It was with slightly heightened colour that she took her usual place at Mrs Trevoise's right hand. Mrs Musgrave was absorbed in a rather excited conversation with Mrs Levison, and Betty found that Mrs Trevoise had her attention directed to a newcomer, who had been placed at her left hand, just opposite to Betty's seat.

He was a great tall man, with a thin, clean-shaven face, and something of a swaggering manner, who looked as if he had been hardened, blackened, and bruised by life in its very roughest aspects.

Betty noticed that he drank very sparingly, and seemed quite indifferent to what he ate. She encountered his bold eyes fixed on her, and looked hastily away: she had never sat at table with anyone quite like this before, for the oleaginous vulgarity of the young Jews was of a perfectly different type; it annoyed her extremely. In consequence her manner grew more freezing than usual. She replied in monosyllables to any remark addressed to her, and kept her eyes fixed upon the tablecloth.

Mrs Trevoise was particularly shiny that evening, both in her garments and her expression, appearing delighted to welcome the newcomer, who seemed to be an old acquaintance.

"Dear, dear, Mr Drake," she murmured, with

an affectionate glance, "T'it's quite a treat to see you here again—in our midst once more—and still a bachelor!"

Betty heard the man grunt at this.

"T'it's not t' fault of t' ladies I'll be bound," continued the cheerful voice. "T'at's t' worst of a rovin' disposition, Mr Drake, t' it leaves no time to form t' domestic ties!"

Betty shuddered to herself as she rose to follow her mother from the room after the stale biscuits and sweating second-hand fruits had been placed upon the table. Mrs Musgrave, in passing by Drake's chair, let her handkerchief fall. He handed it to her with an air of greater politeness than his appearance at first suggested. He looked at her as he did so with the hard, swift glance of a man accustomed to take a rapid valuation of everyone he met. Betty could not fail to notice the look, or to guess what it implied.

That evening Mrs Musgrave was in one of her proud, sad moods. Refusing to go into the drawing-room after dinner, she retired to their own bedroom, which was bitterly cold, and smelling of back smoke: there she rolled herself in a shawl, and sat rocking back and forwards in her chair—an action Betty had learnt to dread.

"Come downstairs, mother! Do!" urged the girl, knowing how bad it was for her to brood alone.

"No—no—Betty—I can't stand it! Fancy having to eat with people of that sort—you—my poor child!"

"Never mind about me; some of them are very kind."

"Oh, yes; kind enough, I daresay. But when I remember—oh! Betty, I wish you were safely married, child, and that I were in my grave—why did I not die years ago! I remember when my poor baby was born—your little brother, who only lived a day—how I asked to see him, and how cold he was; and at night how I dreamt I was lying in my coffin with the cold child there upon my breast—I wish it had been true!"

Then followed tears and gasping, until she was persuaded to go to bed. Betty sat with her for half-an-hour, and when she was calmer again left her and went down to the drawing-room.

The German was playing, so that her entrance was unobserved. She slipped into a corner behind the piano, where she hoped to sit without having to speak to anyone.

She had been listening in a dreamy way to the music, which was very good, when she became aware that Mrs Trevoise was talking to someone behind the screen close to her chair.

Betty involuntarily overheard the first sentences.

"T'igh family!" the good woman exclaimed. "But in unfortunately reduced circumstances."

"Old woman off her head a bit?" inquired Drake.

"Dear! dear! Not t-at-all! T'it's *just* t'igh-strung disposition, some of t' *little* peculiarities of t' artistic temperament."

"H'm—yes—I see."

Betty moved away; not, however, before she had caught the word "introduction" from Mrs Trevoise.

Holding her head very high in the air she walked past them. Had it come to this then! She was always now trying to subdue her pride; but at that moment it became rebellious.

Introduce! Mrs Trevoise to speak of "introducing" a person of that sort to her! She sat down in a corner, and took up her knitting, without exchanging a word with anyone.

The person calling herself "Madam Marchand" had not appeared at dinner that evening. Two nights in the week she had an engagement to teach dancing somewhere, and, when she did come in, was often so cruelly tired, that Betty, who was fond of children, had once or twice offered to put Béb  to bed before she came home.

The child now began to get sleepy. Mrs Trevoise crossed the room to the corner where Betty sat. "T'is little darlin's ready for its bed, Miss Musgrave," she said.

"Oh, is she?" Betty answered, thankful for the distraction amidst her sorrowful thoughts. "I'll put her to bed then." But the child seemed reluctant to go, stifling her yawns, and murmuring something about "Dake's watch" that Betty did not comprehend. "Come away, B   . You must be good, and do as you are told," said Betty, conclusively.

She took B   's hand, and led her away from the room. At the foot of the stairs they met

Mr Drake, and Bébé, pulling her hand from Betty's, ran to him, embracing his knees, and demanding something in her eager, clucking voice.

Betty could not pass upstairs. "Come, Bébé," she called, when the man said, with his bold air, and yet at the same time speaking shyly:

"It's my watch—she wants to hear it strike—a repeater."

He took it out, and bending down held it to the child's ear, who exclaimed with delight at the little tingling strokes.

"Cally, cally!" she called then. He swung her up on his shoulder and carried her upstairs. Betty followed slowly. When she came up Drake was disentangling one of the child's long, foolish curls that had caught on the button of his sleeve. His hard hands were ill adapted to the action, but Betty noticed how gentle he tried to be. He kissed the child on each cheek when he had finished, and then stood for a moment before Betty as if uncertain what to do. Then bowing, he said: "Good-night!" in a rough, abrupt manner.

"Good-night," Betty repeated, with cold distinctness, not looking at him again.

The child's face smelt of his tobacco as Betty took off her clothes. She wriggled about like an eel, telling a wonderful story of which the girl could make out only a few words.

But, in spite of all her efforts to appear lively, she was very sleepy, and when Betty had lifted her limp little body into bed, the head, with its

unwholesomely long hair, had scarcely touched the pillow before her eyelids closed.

"Say your prayers, Bébé," commanded Betty.

"Jesus, tender Shepherd," she began the rhyme that Mrs Trevoise had taught her.

"Bless," said Betty.

"Thy little lamb——" But Bébé got no further before she fell asleep.

Betty stood looking down at her, remembering her own sheltered childhood, and how she used to be made to repeat that very prayer. It called up such images to her mind. "Jesus, tender Shepherd." Ah! the hills; the green and lonely border hills, where the sheep were feeding, down whose valleys the clear streams ran.

She seemed to see again the shifting lilac shadows, the wavering spots of sunlight on the grassy slopes. She heard the cry, high and trembling, of the young lambs! Was the heart then of Him that the child had cried to harder than hers? Was it all a delusion—an empty dream? She looked at the child, lying with her long curl-papers on the grimy pillows, and sighed; then turned to fold up "her bits of things," as Mrs Trevoise called the tawdry little garments, and left the room with a sore heart.

As she came slowly downstairs again, the door of the smoking-room opened, and she barely escaped meeting all the Jews who came out in a group along with Drake—laughing. Betty

drew back for a moment unobserved. She heard Drake's voice, apparently continuing some previous conversation. "Ah, well" (he was saying), "as the Spanish proverb goes, '*Poor Beauty has more Love than Husbands!*'"

CHAPTER XXIII

FOR a week the heat had been great. In town it was overpowering, and Betty wilted under it like a flower. The house was not so full as usual, two or three people having gone away. Mrs Musgrave was in a fit of sullen gloom, at times so irritable that Betty despaired altogether.

One afternoon the girl had gone out by herself to Kensington Gardens. She thought it better to sit there looking at the shadows amongst the trees, trying to fancy it the country. She sat on an empty bench beside the pond, paying no attention to anyone who passed by. Suddenly she heard her own name called out in a little high voice, "*Bettee ! Bettee !*" and, looking up, she saw Béb  and Mr Drake. The child had hold of his hand, and she carried a biscuit with which she was going to feed the water-fowl. Betty smiled and nodded to her, but B b  was not satisfied with that. She ran up to Betty, plucking at her skirt, and entreating her to come and help to "feed the hens" (B b  always helped to feed Mrs Trevose's moth-eaten poultry).

"I'm too hot, B b , to stand in the sun ; run along and feed the pretty hens by yourself," said Betty, who had acknowledged Drake's presence only by a cold little inclination of the head.

He took the child down to the water's edge, and presently seeing her out of harm's way, happily employed with "the hens," he walked back to the bench where Betty was sitting.

"May I sit down here?"

"Oh, certainly," Betty answered, without looking at him. He seated himself beside her, leaning forwards with his hands hanging over his knees, and his head bent so that she could not see his face, only the back of his head, and his neck burnt by the sun.

He looked almost as rough as a labouring man, she thought. She had sometimes wondered what his life had been, and how long he was going to stay on with Mrs Trevose, doing nothing. He did not look like the sort of man to be idle. After a few minutes she made up her mind that she could now move away without appearing to be rude, and she was just about to rise, when he suddenly addressed her.

"You are Scotch, Miss Musgrave?"

"Yes; I am," Betty replied, in the cold, detached tone that she always used to all the men at Mrs Trevose's, whenever they dared to speak to her.

"My mother was a Scotswoman," said Drake.

"Oh, indeed!"

"I had a hard life," he said, suddenly, turning to Betty, and speaking with such an effort, that he flushed a dark red as he looked at her. "A hard struggle; for my father died when I was born." He paused, and drew a long breath. "My mother," he said, and paused again.

"Was very poor?" said Betty, who in spite of herself felt interested.

"Poor — no; that would have been nothing! She cared nothing about me. She left me to pick up what education I could get anywhere I had a mighty desire to get on in the world, and I worked hard — at all sorts of things," he held his hands, palm outwards, looking at them. "I've done some rough work. I've worked like a navvy on the lines. I've wrought in a foundry like a labouring man. She was there in the background—a drag on me always."

"She was not strong?" said Betty, wondering what impelled him to tell her all this.

"She was a drunkard," he answered, in a very low voice, bending his head again, so that the girl could not see his face.

"*Oh!*" said Betty, but this time there was a whole world of sympathy in the exclamation.

Drake raised his head, and rubbed his hand over his face. "Then," he said, "I got on a bit, you see. Got engineering work to do, and went abroad. It was then I got to know Mrs Trevose. She kept my mother for a long time in her house. . . . I'll not forget all that she did for me."

"Is your mother still alive?" asked Betty.

"No—dead; died years ago, when I was in America."

He drew a long breath, and sat silent. Betty did not know what to say.

"Are you going home now?" he asked; for she had risen from the bench.

"Not straight home. I've something to do on the way," she answered, hurriedly, resolving to go into a shop on some small errand, because she was afraid that he would offer to walk home along with her.

The man smiled a little at her quick, cold reply, understanding exactly what she meant, and he turned instantly away to join Béb  at the edge of the pond, while Betty walked off alone, conscious of a curious feeling of discomfort.

"I couldn't help being rude to him," she thought; "it is so dreadful when they begin to speak to me." "They" meant the men that she saw at Mrs Trevo s's—unpleasant, no doubt, and anxious to please her, but as yet always by far too much afraid of her to have given her much annoyance.

When she came in, Betty found her mother pacing about the room, looking rather agitated.

"What a long time you have been away, Betty!" she said, "I couldn't think what had become of you. I was sorry you were out, for Mr Smythe has been here."

"I'm very glad that I was out," said Betty, who did not make any secret of her dislike to Mr Smythe.

"It seems rather funny," went on Mrs Musgrave, hesitating, and looking at her daughter as she spoke. "It is odd; but he has decided to come and live here for a week or two. Everyone he knows is out of town at present. It will be quite a pleasure to have him here."

"Here, mother!" Betty stood still with her hat in her hand. "*Here*," she repeated, fixing her eyes on her mother. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that he is going to take rooms here for a few weeks."

"In this house?"

"Yes," said Mrs Musgrave, turning with a defiant look at the girl. "Why not? If *I* can live in this house—I, who have been accustomed all my life to such different surroundings, there is surely nothing remarkable in that."

"There is," said Betty; she was deeply annoyed. She came close up to her mother, and looked her in the eyes. "You know that we only live here because we cannot do anything else—we cannot help it; but you know very well that a man—even such as *that*—would as soon think of going to the workhouse as of coming to this place: he won't eat a mouthful of the food—he——"

"Well, Betty, I don't know what you have to do with his reasons," her mother interrupted, sharply. "His affairs are his own, surely; this is not our house, and I consider it very ill-bred of you to inquire into another person's affairs."

Betty made no reply. She turned away with a sick feeling at the heart. It was not only that she disliked the man. She felt that he had some reason deeper than she knew for subjecting himself to the discomforts of such a household as that of Mrs Trevese. As she thought of what it might be, her cheeks burned with anger.

"As if he could ever think that I would marry

him, or look at him, or endure him for a moment." Then she remembered that her mother had borrowed money from him, and her annoyance deepened. She tried to reason it away. After all, he had promised never to do that again, and, except her own instinctive dislike of him, she had no reason to suppose that he would not speak the truth. He might be in some difficulty about money; it was possible that he was just coming there to economise. He might very probably be a person so little fastidious about his surroundings, that even that house would be endurable to him. She tried, with this assurance, to dismiss the subject from her thoughts.

Mr Smythe arrived two days afterwards. He took his seat near them at table, making pretence to eat, and conversing with much affability with his neighbour on the left.

Drake sat on the other side of the table; once or twice Betty saw that he fixed on him one of those swift, hard glances of his. Betty had never spoken to Drake since that afternoon in the Park, but his presence had quite ceased to annoy her, and she met his eyes without any feeling of displeasure. She even thought that she was glad that he sat opposite to her instead of Mr Smythe.

"Who's that, Mrs Trevose?" she heard him inquire of the landlady; and Mrs Trevose replied:

"T'is a Mr Smythe, quite t' old beau, Mr Drake! But t' white hair gives t' appearance of age; he's a smart man yet, t' affability of his manners is *most* strikin'."

CHAPTER XXIV

"CAN this be the house?" said Oliver to himself.

He had come back to town again with Betty's address,—an hour after his arrival found him there. He stood looking about him for a minute before he rang the bell. "Can this be the house?" he repeated. From one of the upper windows, which stood open, there floated the notes of a violin played by an unskilful hand; he noticed the hollow worn by the rain-drops on the door-stone. The wooden trellis-work above the door had formerly supported some climbing plant, now dead, and slats were amissing on it here and there, while others hung awry. He could not be mistaken, for he looked again at the address in his note-book, and read the name "Trevoze" on the smeared doorplate. "It must be," he said—then pulled at the bell, that jangled loud within the house.

After a due interval the door was opened by a red-headed maid-servant with a powdered face.

"Is Miss Musgrave staying here?" he inquired.

Mr Smythe, who had happened to cross the lobby at the moment, heard the question, and saw Oliver at the door. He smiled to himself.

Oliver hoped for a moment that he might have been mistaken in the address after all.

"Yes—what name?" said the girl, with a toss of her head.

Oliver looked her up and down. "Lacy," he said; "Mr Lacy. Here is a card—take that to her."

She conducted him along the dark passage, and threw open a door, exclaiming shrilly, "Mr Lacy," then banged it again, and left him standing in the empty room.

Oliver looked about him, sniffing the air tainted with perfume and stale tobacco smoke, noticing the chipped gilt consols, the dirty plush settees, the smeared paint, the litter of cards and newspapers on the tables. "Good Heavens! Is *she* *here*?" he thought.

The maid, meanwhile, had flounced into Betty's room, where she sat mending an old dress.

"Gentleman to see you, miss," said she, laying down the card on the table.

Betty looked at it; then put down her work and raised her head; her face flamed with colour like a rose in June; her heart beat thick; she looked in the mirror, but she could not see.

"Mother is out!" she thought; then she went downstairs slowly. "Before I come up, it may all be different," she thought.

Oliver was standing on the hearth-rug when she entered the room. He came forward to meet her, saying some words that she did not hear. At sight of him Betty's blushes died away. She

looked up at him, as she gave him her hand, with the same look of childlike confidence with which she had honoured him that day by the river at St Julliets. She murmured something about his coming, and sat down as if she had nothing more to say. Oliver drew a chair close to hers. He had not quite made up his mind as to what he was going to do; he meant to be very cool and collected; but now her actual presence, the beautiful heavily-fringed eyelids, the melting curve of her mouth, the slight inclination of her whole body towards him, as a child moves nearer to one it loves, all made his brain swim. He delayed for one moment to parley with himself. "If I kiss her it's all up—but—yes I must, it's worth anything."

"Betty," he began, and it did not seem at all strange to her that he should call her by her name. She turned round, and looked straight at him. It is a common report that a drowning man, in one second of time, sees the whole of his past life before him. However that may be, in those two or three seconds whilst she turned her pure eyes on his face, every evil thing that he had ever done seemed to stand up in judgment in Oliver Lacy's heart. "Betty," he said, this time in a very gentle voice, "Do you know why I have come here to-day?"

"Oh yes!" Betty answered. A little smile began to move the dimples at the corner of her mouth, but she looked into his face without mistrust or hesitation—when, suddenly, just as Oliver

was about to speak, the door of the sitting-room opened, and, with a heavy, uncertain step, Mrs Musgrave came wandering into the room. She wore an outdoor mantle, but had no bonnet on; her grey hair hung about her neck in disorder, and her face was deeply flushed. Seeing that Betty was talking to a stranger, making an effort to collect herself, she advanced towards him with a staggering step, and a vague effusive smile.

Oliver stiffened, and drew himself up. He was not in general a person with any airs, but now he seemed armed in a thousand.

Betty stood between them silent.

"Ah! — gentleman — I see — friend — oh, so pleased — to see a friend—always," stammered Mrs Musgrave. She laid hold of a little table that stood beside her, trying to steady herself against it; it was too slight, and if Oliver had not jumped forward and caught her as it toppled over she would have fallen to the ground. "Ah! very kind," she ejaculated, as she dropped into a chair. Her head fell forward on her chest, and she murmured away to herself indistinguishable words.

Betty turned to Oliver.

"*This is my mother,*" she said, in a low distinct voice, holding up her head very high. Oliver bit his lip, and bowed in silence. He remembered, all of a sudden, a scene he had come across in the street one day—a woman struggling with a policeman; he recognised her only too well. No wonder that it had haunted him at the time.

Betty went and stood behind her mother's chair. She laid her hand deliberately upon her shoulder, standing looking at Oliver, who tried to go on talking. He made some foolish remarks, conscious that his voice was husky, and that he spoke at random.

"You have a long way to go," said Betty, after a minute had passed, "I suppose you cannot wait any longer."

"I—I—no—I think I must go now," he answered. He took her hand for a moment as he said good-bye. It was as cold as a stone. She did not look at him as he went away. He closed the door, feeling his way along the dark passage, stumbling again on the torn mat—and so got out into the street.

Mr Smythe, who had seen Mrs Musgrave enter the drawing-room, now watched Oliver's exit, standing at one of the front windows. He marked the pace at which he set off, and noticed how he was shrugging his shoulders as he went. "A pearl in the mud," he said, laughing to himself, as if at a good joke; "but some have too clean hands to pick it up."

CHAPTER XXV

BETTY stood behind her mother's chair until she heard the street door slam when Oliver went out; then she bent down, and urged her to come upstairs and lie down.

Mrs Musgrave at first refused. "Why should I—perfectly well—go—go away—leave me," she said, pushing the girl away. In a few minutes, however, she got up from her chair, and allowed herself to be led from the room. Betty knew that Mrs Trevose had gone out that afternoon. She was ashamed to call the servant to her assistance, so she steadied her mother as well as she could, and led her into the passage. They had only gone a few paces, however, when she slipped on the greasy waxcloth, and clung heavily to Betty's arm.

"Come, mother! come upstairs," urged the girl, in a low voice, hauling her along as well as she could, but they had only mounted three steps, when she again tripped, and fell forwards with a lurch. In vain Betty tried to raise her, urged her to make an effort to rise; she only clung to the railing, and murmured incoherent abuse.

A door opened on the landing above, and the young Jew and his mother came out. He made a movement as if to assist them, but Mrs Levison

plucked at his sleeve. Betty saw her diamonds twinkle, and heard the word "*drinking*," as she rustled along the passage.

Once more, the girl tried to raise her mother, in vain. Then she stood up, and looked about her in despair. Would no one come to help her? Would Mrs Trevoise never come in?

In another moment she saw Drake coming towards them. Without saying a word, or asking permission, he stooped down and lifted Mrs Musgrave, then, half-carrying her, he managed to get her upstairs.

"Which room?" he asked, without turning his head.

Betty stepped in front of them, and opened the door in silence. He lifted Mrs Musgrave on to the bed, stepped to the window and drew down the blind, then stood for a moment looking at her.

"You'd better loosen the neck of her dress," he said. Betty stood clinging to the foot of the bed. "She's been at it for a day or two," he went on; "shouldn't let her have money."

"I don't," said the girl.

"Where does she get it, then? Ah! but I needn't ask that," he added, quickly, with a short sigh. "There is nothing more that I can do for you?" He spoke in a low voice, with his head hanging down, as if the shame had been his, not hers.

"Nothing, thank you," said Betty.

"I'll send Mrs Trevoise up here whenever she

comes in. She's very kind," he said, as he went away.

It seemed a very long time to Betty until Mrs Trevoise appeared. She came in with elastic step, cautiously and quickly closing the door behind her. The touch of her little greasy hand made Betty turn and cling to her. "Dear! dear!" she whispered. "T'is is dreadful; how did it happen! T'over fatigue—*complete* prostration—she shouldn't have been allowed out alone."

"No," Betty answered; "I did all that I could to prevent it. She said that she was only going to post a letter; she had no money."

Promising to send up some strong coffee, and having helped Betty to put her mother to bed, Mrs Trevoise at last left the room. She found Drake waiting in the passage. "Look here," he said, drawing her aside, "who gives that woman money?"

"T'it's impossible to say, dear," said Mrs Trevoise. "Miss Musgrave, she's given me nearly every penny t'at she's has. T'ere's not too much to pay t'eir board, Mr Drake (but t'at's neither here nor t'ere—they're very welcome!). T'ere's t'em t'at disbelieves t' Bible, dear, about t' drop in t' widow's cruse; but I'm t'inkin' they haven't seen much of *t'is* world. T' Evil One himself keeps some people supplied."

"H'm! She's never been like this before?"

"Not for a *long* time—never so bad as t'is. I won't say but at times she's been *slightly* excited, but nothin' more t'an t'effects of a *small* quan-

tity of stimulant upon t' *exceedingly* nervous disposition."

Drake made no reply. That evening at dinner, he kept his eyes fixed upon Mr Smythe, observing that he had taken Mrs Musgrave's usual seat, as if aware that she would not appear, and that he looked constantly at the door, as if he expected someone to come in.

"Miss Musgrave not coming down to-night?" he inquired of Mrs Trevoise.

"Mrs Musgrave's *slightly* indisposed," was the reply. "T'it's probably a *touch* of t'influenza, and Miss Musgrave won't leave her for a moment."

Betty sat up that night, until she was sick with cold and weariness. Her mother had fallen into a heavy slumber. At last, about two in the morning, when she could sit up no longer, the girl lay down beside her. She had kept the gas turned low. She shut her eyes, and tried to pray, but the words failed her for weariness, and brought no comfort to her soul. All that fragile castle of happiness which, almost unconsciously, she had been building for herself, as youth will ever do—was now fallen to the ground. She knew very well what the look on Oliver's face had meant.

Then, with poignant misery, like the return of unendurable pain, came the most vivid recollection of St Julliets. She remembered the sunlight and the spring meadows with a keenness of sensation that only morbid feeling can arouse—the very scent of the land—the falling of the

shallow river—one thing in especial, a tree of hawthorn, as yet without a blossom on it, glowing, a living brilliant green, against the blue, blue sky—it seemed to her as if it were a hundred years ago that she had seen it there, and as if it grew visible before her now.

Again Oliver seemed to stand looking down at her with his large humorous gaze. She rolled her head on the pillow. He seemed to bend down over her, with his strong, genial presence. She heard his sweet voice. . . .

She unclosed her eyes, and breathed the air that was heavy with smoke. Her glance fell for a moment on the dismal wall opposite, with its soiled paper peeling off in strips; on the smeared paint of the window-shutters, and the tawdry, cracked toilet glass. Oh! why had he not bodily presence there? She turned one look at the head—dishonoured—sunk in the pillows beside her, and shuddered. Her whole heart cried out against his faithlessness. He had left her without one kind word. She knew what he had felt. What was a man good for but to stand by his Love were she in trouble—and she had trusted him with all her heart!

CHAPTER XXVI

OLIVER left London the next day. When he came home Mrs Lacy regarded him at first with some anxiety. Every time that he spoke to her she looked up with an intent expression, as if she expected to hear unwelcome news. But none came; and as a week passed she felt relieved. Oliver was in an unwonted state of depression, taking not the slightest interest in anything, spending hours alone, sometimes, when in company, sunk in a kind of abstraction, very unlike himself. He would rouse himself from this with an effort, reply to any remark that had been made to him, and then sink back into the same dull brooding on the subject that was evidently never far from his thoughts. "She can't have refused him," thought Mrs Lacy; "for I know she wouldn't be so foolish—no one would be; and she can't have accepted him, for he wouldn't look like that—it must have been his own doing. Then, what is wrong?" She could not make it out.

One day, when she asked her son if he had seen Betty Musgrave in town, he replied, "Yes; once," in a tone that warned her to inquire no further. But that very evening, he said to her suddenly, "Bring out your Kathleen, or Helen,

or some other good girl, mother. I think it's time that I were married and settled down." He spoke in a tone that any woman, less obtuse than Mrs Lacy, would have understood.

"My dear boy," she answered, smiling, "do not speak of 'my Kathleen' in that way. Kathleen is a very particular young woman, I can assure you, and she would not like to be spoken of like that."

"I didn't mean any harm. You know I like her very much—we got on capitally. I was only joking."

He said nothing more on the subject, but Mrs Lacy thought about it a good deal, with the result that she came to the conclusion that matters were going to right themselves at last. Kathleen and her mother had gone to stay with a relative of their own not very far off. If Oliver wanted to see her he could easily do so.

Oliver kept away from the Rectory. Mrs Wentworth had been very seriously ill; and, as she could not go out, and he did not go there, some time passed before they met. She questioned her husband regarding him the first Sunday after he came back. "Yes," the rector replied; "Oliver was there—and very attentive, too—at least, he never raised his head the whole time of the sermon."

"If I could only see him, I would know!" sighed Mrs Wentworth. She had had no letter from Betty in answer to her last. She sent a message to Oliver after a few days, telling him

that she wanted him to come and see her. He came at once, and saw her in her own room. He had always loved the old lady; and now, when he saw the change that her illness had wrought, the look of suffering on her face, that made her seem far away from him, he was at first so much affected that he could not speak. Mrs Wentworth smiled at him, patting his hand. "Sit down, Oliver; sit down and talk to me—I am tired of myself. Tell me what you saw in London."

Oliver gave her a brief and dull account of what he had done—then sat in silence, doubly embarrassed, first, by the consciousness of her curiosity regarding Betty; and in the second place, by the awkward distress that all young people feel, when they are with anyone who is dangerously ill.

Mrs Wentworth lay back looking at him, observing his dull, preoccupied stare, so different from the usual alert, good-humoured expression of his eyes. She tried, unsuccessfully, to make him talk about other things, then asked him straight out:

"And did you see my young friend, Betty—eh?"

"I did," said Oliver, hanging his head.

"How was she—poor child? Did you see her mother?"

"I did," Oliver repeated, still hanging his head.

"Ah!" breathed Mrs Wentworth, conscious she had touched the cause of his silence. "I have only seen her once, for a few minutes."

"She is dreadful!" Oliver looked up at Mrs Wentworth's wise old face, framed in the white lace frill of her nightcap. "Dreadful," he repeated. "The day that I saw her she—was quite drunk!" He leaned his arm on the back of his chair, and covered his eyes with his hand.

Mrs Wentworth watched him in silence. "So that is it!" she said at last, softly. "How I pity that girl!" She closed her eyes for a moment, and her lips trembled. Then she looked up at him. "Her father was a brave man, Oliver," she said. "I was just thinking about him as I lay awake last night. *Sans peur et sans reproche*. Betty is like him."

"She is very beautiful."

Mrs Wentworth had too much tact to try to win any unwilling confidence. She looked sadly at the young man as he bid her good-bye; and when her husband came in told him what Oliver had said. "I am afraid it is all over, Samuel."

"Be thankful then, for he was not enough in love with her, my dear."

"Ah! I don't know that—think of Mrs Lacy. She has such a strong influence over him; and then the disgrace is so dreadful."

The rector was silent.

"*Almost* enough to keep a man from marrying any girl!"

"Not for a moment," said Mr Wentworth, hotly.

"Do you not really think so?"

"No," said the rector; "I do not."

CHAPTER XXVII

"I NEVER was so much astonished in my life," said Kathleen Rorke; and she spoke the truth.

Oliver and she were sitting together in the schoolroom of the house (her brother's), where she and her mother were staying. Oliver had several times before come over from St Julliot's to see her. Kathleen thought it very natural that he should. This wet day he had ridden over, to find everyone out, and Kathleen alone with her two little nieces in the schoolroom. Very sweet she looked with one child on her lap, and the other sprawling on the rug at her feet. He had stood and admired them for a minute at the door, while they were still unaware of his presence. Kathleen had jumped up to welcome him gladly, when he spoke. Then they gave him schoolroom tea, and afterwards the children ran off, leaving him alone with her.

It was a day of ceaseless heavy rain. The sound of it, drip, drip, dripping by the window, made a very suitable accompaniment to Oliver's thoughts.

He sat with his head bent and his eyes on the ground, while Kathleen, who had suddenly turned pale with surprise, looked at him in amazement. He had just asked her to marry him.

"I never was so much surprised in my life," he repeated.

"Why?" said Oliver, without looking up.

"Oh! because I thought that you cared for someone else," said Kathleen, simply. Then she added, "What about Betty Musgrave?"

"Don't—please," said Oliver, in a low, choking voice. He raised his eyes, and Kathleen quickly laid her hand upon his arm. She was startled by the look he had given her.

"I am so sorry. I will never speak about her again—but—is it quite hopeless?"

"Yes; quite."

Kathleen sat silent. "I cannot possibly give you an answer to-day," she said, after a little. Oliver had to be content with that. He soon took his leave, and Kathleen sat alone in the schoolroom in the gathering dusk, listening to the drip of the rain, thinking very deeply over what he had said to her.

What was it that had gone wrong between Oliver and Betty? Certainly, he had appeared to be in love with her, only a month or two before. Certainly, he had been deeply hurt by something—in his pride, if not in his heart—now. The way that he had looked at her when she mentioned Betty's name, told her that. But Kathleen was sensible, not romantic. She knew, also, that the exact truth about any love affair can never be known to any except the two people therein concerned—and that they never, or very rarely, tell it.

She knew that there are a hundred different stages of feeling, a hundred different delusions in the heart of most of us, that pass for love—and in time fade wholly away, leaving scarcely a memory behind. Some such already lay in her own heart. But one of them, she knew, would never be quite faded; like withered violets shut between the pages of a book—still smelling of spring. At the remembrance of that Kathleen shook her head, thinking of Oliver's dispassionate speeches an hour ago. He had based his argument on the fact of their old friendship, on their agreeing so well with each other, finally, on his early admiration for her. "I used to be so much in love with you, Kathleen," he had said, without adding a word of love in the present. Kathleen was not deceived; but she liked him greatly.

"I think I could love him—I think that I could make him love me—shall I do it?" she said to herself, over and over again. The ceaseless dripping and running of the rain in the leads by the window, sounded like a voice gurgling away at some long-winded statement. She almost thought that it was arguing out the matter along with her. She remembered that day at St Julliotics when she had seen Betty in such distress. "I thought then that it was something about her mother," said Kathleen to herself, "but it must have been something quite different. She must have cared for someone else all the time. Poor Oliver"; and in her

heart she condemned Betty for her behaviour to him.

"Poor Oliver. I wonder if I can love him?" she repeated. Certainly that was an unromantic, bald way of putting it. There can be no doubt that the most dignified reply that a woman can make in such a situation always is:

"I do not love you; therefore I cannot marry you." But, perhaps, most women, if they told the truth, would confess, at one time or other, to having seriously considered the possibility of marrying in spite of the first objection. It is occasionally overcome.

When the children came back again, Kathleen's reverie came to an end.

Half-an-hour later, at the schoolroom desk, with a scratchy schoolroom pen, and a hand that trembled a good deal, she wrote to Oliver.

"Yesterday," she wrote, "I went into the garden to pull a rose. It was faded; so I took another flower, and found it very sweet. Perhaps that may happen so with both of us. I am sorry that I spoke of anything which hurt you. I will never do so again."

She sighed as she sealed it and sent it off.

Oliver came again the next day. In the evening he told his mother that Kathleen promised to marry him. This with such a respectable show of cheerfulness, that Mrs Lacy suspected nothing. She embraced him fondly, and at once wrote to congratulate "dear Kathleen," giving

her a "daughter's welcome," begging her to come and stay at St Julliot's again.

"Dear Kathleen," however, was too prudent for that. She did not like Mrs Lacy, and had no wish to dislike her more before her marriage, so she replied in a "nice" note that made Oliver smile. He said to himself that he was thankful that Kathleen "was not stupid at any-rate"—and the next moment shut his eyes like a man who is blinded by some sudden pain.

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHEN Mrs Wentworth heard of Oliver's intended marriage, she was not altogether surprised.

"I thought that would be the end of it," she said. "I do not want to see that girl again, Samuel. I never want to see her again, not though she were as good as Dorcas and as lovely as Helen. I'm thankful that I'm in my bed and ill, so that I cannot be expected to write insincere notes of congratulation. You may tell Oliver that I'm too ill to see him. I am. I am going to write to Betty Musgrave this very day—and may Heaven send her a better man than Oliver!"

"Oliver is a good fellow."

"He's nothing of the sort: he's his mother's son; he prefers respectable connections and money to the love of his heart."

"The children of this world——" began the rector.

"They are not, Samuel—and you know it. Go away now, and leave me to write to Betty."

She was very weak, and it cost her an effort to write even a few lines. It was especially painful to write this; "but I cannot let her hear it by chance—perhaps from a stranger," she

thought. As she wrote, Betty's face rose up before her, and her eyes filled with tears. "I feel as if I were obliged to strike her," she said, then gathered up her courage, and went on.

Betty got the letter the next day. She had been out on some errand for her mother, and found it lying on the hall table when she came in. She recognised the handwriting at a glance.

"Oh! Mrs Wentworth wants me to go there again," she thought. "Perhaps he has asked her to ask me." In spite of herself her heart beat fast, and she caught up the letter, and carried it into the drawing-room. There was seldom anyone there at that time of day. She knew that her mother was in their own room, and did not want to read the letter before her. The drawing-room was hot and dark, for it was a warm, foggy afternoon. Betty sat down by the window that looked out into the back garden, to get enough of light to read by. She slowly unfolded the letter, noticing how feeble the handwriting was. Mrs Wentworth began by telling of her illness. Betty had not known how serious its nature had been till then, and for the moment she forgot all about herself as she read. Was she going to lose this friend too? she thought.

"There is little or nothing that anyone can do for me now, but I think"—wrote Mrs Wentworth, "that it is only when the very dearest, the very nearest of human aid is useless; that, as a young bird is pushed over the nest, so the soul is thrown

out as it seems on despair---to find that it has wings and can fly away and be at rest."

She wrote then about affairs in the parish, about the rector, and, last of all, about Oliver's approaching marriage. Betty read to the end of the letter, and then sat staring at the signature; below was a little postscript.

"I should like to see your sweet face again in this world, Betty: but if not here, then in some other—where the old shall be young again, and the young are wise."

Slowly Betty lifted her eyes to the dull window panes, and looked out where the moth-eaten fowls were cowering under the wire netting. The fog hung like a blanket over the housetops, there was scarcely air to breathe, or light enough to see, and she knew that hope in her heart was dead.

She sat for a long while, not thinking consciously of anything in particular, only trying to keep still, as one tries not to move when in great pain, lest any movement should make it worse. She held the letter in her hand, and counted the lines on the page; she counted the fowls in the garden; she counted the strokes of the clock. She kept saying to herself, "What is the matter? It is nothing. I knew it before. I never expected anything else. I must be quiet. There is someone coming. No one must see what I feel."

She was still sitting holding the letter in her hand when someone entered the room. It was Mr Smythe, who had been away for some days. Betty had hoped that he had gone for good.

She started a little when she saw him. She never, if she could avoid it, spoke to any of the men in the house, always keeping out of their way as much as possible.

Mr Smythe advanced, with a smile. "Ah! don't go away," he exclaimed; "don't go whenever I come into the room, Miss Musgrave—I never have an opportunity of speaking to you." Betty murmured something about having to go to her mother. He detained her for a moment.

"You are suffering from the want of country air, and exercise," he said. "I have been thinking—I sometimes go for a ride on a cool morning, and know where I can get a horse that will just suit you—made to carry a lady—if you will allow me, it would be the greatest pleasure to take you out."

"Oh no—thank you." Betty looked at him, without making the smallest effort to conceal her dislike.

"I would never think of such a thing—I never leave my mother."

He looked after her as she swept past him, and ground his teeth under his white beard. "Little vixen," he muttered, as she left the room.

Betty did not cast a second thought to him. She went upstairs slowly. When she entered their own room Mrs Musgrave exclaimed, "You're looking very yellow, Betty—are you feeling ill?"

"It's only the heat, mother. I have been out, and feel tired." She sat down by the window, and looked about the room. Mrs Musgrave was

reading an old novel, lent to her by Mrs Levison ; —owing to the heat she had taken off the bodice of her dress, and put on an old faded dressing-gown. Her face was flushed, and vacant. She leant back in the chair, frowsy, heavy, hopeless looking. Betty turned away her eyes, and looked out at the window. The panes were thickly encrusted with dust, and flies buzzed about between the half-open sashes. She had a sudden sensation of impotent despair, that made her long to leave all these hideous surroundings and go and bury herself somewhere — anywhere that was clean and quiet, where she might hide her face and think. She could not, it seemed, have a moment's solitude, or an instant's quiet day or night in that house. She thought of Kathleen and Oliver — how they might sit together hour after hour if they chose, in the fields or the garden at St Julliets, silent with the silence that can only come from an intimate confidence and love. "He cannot love her, though," she thought. But she would not allow herself to acknowledge that. "Of course he does. He was not in earnest before."

Then she heard the clanging of the dinner bell, and her mother saying, "I am not going down to dinner, Betty — ask Mrs Trevose to send me something upstairs."

Betty entered the hot room, that resounded with the clatter of plates and the squealing of knives and forks ; the noise of eating might have been made by swine guzzling at a trough, she thought. Looking like a ghost, she slipped into her usual

seat and lifted a spoon, dim as coffin lead, looking down at the curious iridescence always visible on the soups at Mrs Trevoise's table, as if she saw it for the first time.

She had thought, only a short while ago, that she was becoming indifferent to her surroundings: to-night it seemed as if she had ten senses.

CHAPTER XXIX

WHEN the first weeks of autumn came, Mrs Musgrave fell ill of a sort of low fever, which made her very weak and restless, but as she was unable to go out, and therefore safe from temptation, Betty felt thankful. She spent most of her time in her mother's room, reading or talking, trying, too often in vain, to rouse her to an interest in anything. Mrs Trevoise's kindness never flagged; every day she would appear with some new offering—flowers, generally faded—eggs from her own hens, or a pat of dubious butter, "fresh from t' country"; then she would coax Betty to go out for a while, or to come down to dinner in the evening. As the winter drew on, and the house filled up, of course the good woman had less time, and was unable to help Betty so much, but Mrs Musgrave was recovering, and able now to go about again.

She began to urge Betty to leave Mrs Trevoise's.

"I feel," she would say, "that it is degrading to you, as well as to myself, to associate with such people. We ought to live in quite a different style." Betty, who knew these complaints well now, felt that she would indeed be glad to leave the house, if she knew how they were to manage to live elsewhere.

Sometimes she wondered how they were to

manage to live at all, for, even with the utmost economy, denying herself in every trifling way that she could think of, it was very difficult for her to meet Mrs Trevose's modest weekly bill. She could only hope that she might be able to keep her mother from any sudden extravagances, such as she constantly ran into if allowed to go out alone. Betty used to lie awake at night, wondering if there was any way by which she could make money. She never deceived herself, realising accurately, that a girl with her own appearance and upbringing, not highly educated, without any special talents, without capital, or connections with any people likely to assist her, is, practically, as unfitted to make money as if she were an infant in arms.

This conviction, which weighed upon her whenever she began to think of the future, was oppressing her one afternoon as she sat adding up the weekly accounts. Mrs Trevose had taken Mrs Musgrave out for a little, so that Betty had an hour to herself. She was busy pencilling out her accounts, when she heard a timid rap at the door ; on opening it, she found Madam Marchand. She held out a little bunch of flowers, saying to Betty, in a deprecating way, "I thought that your mother might care for these, miss."

Betty asked her to come in, saying that she was left alone. "I have been worrying over my accounts," she said, glancing at the bills on the table. "I do wish that I could make some money. How did you begin to teach dancing?"

"I began some years ago," said the woman ; "after——" and a spot of colour deepened in each of her hollow cheeks, "after I lost everything."

"I have lost—nearly everything—now," said Betty.

The woman bent forward, touching her with one of her long, warm hands. "Ah, no, miss—not *that*. I once was young and good-looking like you, and if I hadn't been the bitter fool I was, I might have done many things—gone into a convent and served God, or worked hard at some common work, or starved honest and died happy ; but you can't ever go back on that, miss. Though you weep till your eyes is blind, it'll never be forgiven." She gulped her tears, and continued more cheerfully. "There's one thing you could do, Miss Musgrave, if you'll not take it amiss that I should say so : I'm getting old now, and passe, but once I earned a good deal from artists—for my pretty face."

Betty uttered an involuntary exclamation, and pushed her chair away.

"There, there, miss—now I've made you angry. I knew all about it, you see ; it's not everyone that'll get it ; it's only some faces that will do—I can't quite explain, but I know the looks of them ;—the figure's quite another thing. When I was young," she threw a glance at the mirror, and Betty looked at her, noticing again the remains of her rare beauty, the humble expression of her sunken eyes. "Many's the time—it was Madonnas mostly—that I've sat with Bébé when she was little, till I was that stiff that when the

time was up I nearly fainted away. Never mind, miss," she said, afraid that Betty was hurt. "Excuse me for saying it—people—like us—is very thankful to get it sometimes."

"Thank you—you are very kind," said Betty, who, after Madam Marchand had gone, looked at herself in the glass, then turned away with a shudder. That, surely, would be her very last resource. And yet she knew that her tiny stock of money would last only a very little longer, and that the small sum which remained of her mother's own money would be barely sufficient to keep them, even in the very simplest way of living; they could not afford to stay with Mrs Trevose, unless she could earn something.

She remembered that in the last letter she had received from Mr Wentworth, who wrote instead of his wife, he had added: "My wife asks me to remind you, my dear, that if you ever need advice (unlike most young people), or money, or a friend, or a home—she and I will always be only too delighted to give you one or all, to the best of our ability."

It had comforted the girl, as kind words always do; but she kept an application for material help as a last extremity. Her conversation with Madam Marchand had finally opened her eyes to the fact that she had sunk now to a level almost out of sight of her former life. She tried to harden herself by repeating that "Beggars must not be choosers"; but her hurt pride suffered none the less. She tried to make herself useful to Mrs

Trevose, in a variety of little ways, darned the table linen, washed up spoons and glasses, undertook every small household duty that Mrs Trevose would allow her to attempt—not doing them well at first, for she had no knowledge of these things. Mrs Trevose let her try, knowing that the occupation was good for her, and that it took her mind off her trouble for a little.

One day, when Betty was passing the door of the parlour where Mrs Trevose received her own visitors, she heard Madam Marchand's voice raised in argument with another woman.

"Oh! no — no — you cannot see her. She wouldn't like it," Madam was saying.

"Why not? A cat may look at a king," replied the other voice, and as Betty passed the door, Mrs Trevose came out, calling after her, "Miss Musgrave, dear!"

"Did you wish anything?" Betty asked, turning back. Mrs Trevose beckoned to her to come nearer, closing the door meanwhile.

"T'ere's a lady in t'ere, Miss Musgrave, t'at's anxious to make your acquaintance. T'it's Mrs Jarvis." Betty looked puzzled. "I'll explain t' whole afterwards, dear," said Mrs Trevose, and Betty followed her into the room where the visitor had evidently been entertained to tea, for the remains of a succulent, if somewhat untidy, meal were on the table.

CHAPTER XXX

BETTY had the sense that she had been talked about when she entered the room. Madam Marchand, holding Béb  on her knee, sat on one side of the fire, and on the other stood a tall, stout woman, who wore a black hat with drooping plumes. She looked up at Betty curiously, then turned to Mrs Trevo , speaking in a thick voice, with a slight foreign accent:

"You've got quite a boarding school here, Mrs Trevo —so many young ladies—you must engage me as German governess." She laughed a rich little rollicking laugh, that made Betty suddenly smile, just as a certain chord struck in a room will suddenly evoke a response from a dumb instrument.

"See, see!" exclaimed Mrs Jarvis, watching the girl's face, "the sun comes out." Betty grew grave at once, and she laughed again. "I must go now," she said. "Good-bye, Mrs Trevo ; you're a dear, respectable, old person; you're the only respectable person I've ever known who was not a bore." She turned to Betty: "Good-bye, Miss Musgrave; would you come to see me. I'll show you my models—my little models in clay. I can't do it; but I know how it ought to be done."

When she was gone, Madam and Béb  having followed her to the door, Betty asked Mrs Trevose: "Who is she?"

"T'at's B   's mother, darlin'."

"B   's mother!" echoed the girl in astonishment; "I didn't know that she was alive."

"T'it's the case, though," said Mrs Trevose. "T'it's long ago t'at she first came here—she was young t'en, not more t'en eighteen. She and her mother—t' mother was a Russian—and she was goin' on t' stage then. . . . T'en *out* like a candle"—Mrs Trevose expressed a sudden exit—"and t' next t'ing I sees of her, was when she returned as a widow—all t'ings was different, and she was in t' utmost destitution—and t'en it was t'at poor Madam took care of t' child, for Mr Jarvis he had begun to pay t' attentions, and t' wee darlin' was a *slight* obstacle to t'eir union (t' former marriage havin' been somewhat irregular)"—she slurred largely over the past history, and paused reflective—"but t'at was *all happily* arranged, dear, and t'ey were married soon after. He's a wealthy man, and never interferes with his wife—takes no notice of t' past, and allows some scope for t' artistic nature." She lowered her voice. "Trevose himself had it, dear—t'ey're all alike—well, I know what *it* implies."

Betty, who had received some hints of Mrs Trevose's past experience, thought that she did.

"But there are *some* good people who are artists," she said.

"Surely, surely," replied Mrs Trevose, "but

t'ey require *room*, dear,"—she smiled largely,—“t’ domestic life’s too narrow for t’em—t’ere’s no use in keeping wild fowl in t’ barn yard.” She offered a sigh to the memory of Trevose as she spoke.

Betty had now begun to know, in spite of her pervasive charity, that there were some people whom Mrs Trevose did not like. Mr Smythe was amongst the number. She never found fault with him in any way, but there was a look in her eye when she mentioned him, and a tone in her voice when she spoke to him, that Betty understood.

He came in late that evening, and, meeting Betty, said to her that he would like to speak with her alone for a few minutes.

“I don’t know what you can possibly have to say to me that cannot be said in public,” Betty began; then something in his face made her afraid. “Come into the dining-room. I will speak to you there,” she said.

The gas in the dining-room burned low. The table was still covered with its white cloth. Mr Smythe carefully closed the door. Betty stood right under the light with one hand resting on the table.

“My dear young lady,” he began, coming close up to her, and laying his arm round her shoulder.

Betty moved away. “Please be quick,” she said, “if you have anything to say.”

“Well,” he began, after a cough and a moment’s reflection; “the matter is a painful one, Miss

Musgrave, so perhaps it's better to go straight to the point—straight to the point. The fact is that Mrs Musgrave," he paused again, and looked at the girl, who got pale, "has been from time to time borrowing small sums from me."

"But you told me—you promised me that you would never do so again."

He looked abashed for a moment, but continued: "It is so difficult to refuse a lady—especially an old friend. But the other day I happened to find out"—again he looked at Betty, who stood before him with bent head—"I happened to find out that she had written to two or three people of my acquaintance, and had obtained some—assistance,"—he coughed—"pecuniary assistance—from them. It is, no doubt, very distressing for her to be in such reduced circumstances, but I felt sure that you would prefer that she should not make applications of that sort." His glittering eyes were fixed on Betty.

"You mean—that—my mother—has written to acquaintances of yours—begging for money?" said she, standing bolt upright, speaking slowly. The man bowed in silence. "I think that there must have been some mistake," said Betty; but she felt a strange deathly sensation at her heart. She moved towards the door.

"I fear there has been no mistake," he said, "as I have here a letter—you may read it if you like—from a friend of mine, saying that she had mentioned my name in writing to him."

"*Your* name," said Betty, in a tone that made him flush suddenly and bite his lip.

"Here is the letter," he repeated, holding it out to her.

Betty glanced at it. "Do you know exactly how much has been given to her, by you—and by those people?"

"Ah, well—she has written to more than one—I fancy about fifteen pounds altogether."

"I will pay it immediately. Will you send it back to the people at once—you know who they are." She laid her hand on the door.

"One moment!" he exclaimed. "One moment more, Miss Musgrave; hear me. I am, as you must know, most unwilling to cause you any annoyance. Indeed, if I had not felt sure that sooner or later you would of necessity have found it out, I should never have mentioned the matter at all; what is a trifle of that sort to me? I would have paid up the whole and said nothing about it—delighted to do so, if only you will allow me to hope. You must have seen my admiration for you, my dear."

"Stop—please—do stop," said Betty.

He tried again to put his arm round her. "Come," he said; "be kind to me. Let me take you away—away from all these sordid surroundings. I am not a poor man. I can give you everything—all the luxuries to which you have been accustomed. You are young and beautiful. Why should you enter on a life such as you are now living here. Come, and let me take care of you."

Betty drew herself away from his arm, unable to struggle against the overmastering repulsion that filled her at the sound of his voice. She gave him one short glance.

"Please say no more," she said. "I wouldn't for one moment—think of marrying you—for anything in the whole world. I dislike you more than you can possibly imagine."

Mr Smythe flushed red to the roots of his white hair, then grew pale with anger. His eyes contracted to mere points. Taking a step nearer to her, and looking in her face, "Very well," he said; "that may be so, but perhaps I may mention that you have made a slight mistake—I never asked you to *marry* me. 'Poor Beauty,' as I have heard our friend, Mr Drake, remark, 'has more love than husbands.'"

All Betty's ancestors, on her father's side, had been strong men and brave. It seemed a cruel thing that now, being a woman, one of their blood should have to bear an insult without even striking a blow in return; but her blue eyes flickered and stabbed like steel, as she looked at the man for a moment; then left the room without a word.

CHAPTER XXXI

"T'IT'S t' way with t'em *all*, darlin'," said Mrs Trevose. "T'ey'll beg and borrow"—she paused on the last word, substituting, "do *any-thing*, to get it, dear. I was wonderin' how she got t' money."

"What shall I do!" Betty exclaimed. "I must pay back all that at once."

"You'll allow me to lend t' money, darlin'," said Mrs Trevose, but she spoke with a slight hesitation, knowing that Betty had nothing to pay it back with, and not having any to spare.

Betty shook her head. "Not if I can help it! You can't afford it. I don't know when I should be able to pay you again. I must get something to do."

Mrs Trevose looked at her compassionately. "T'at'll not be easy for t' likes of you, Miss Musgrave,—but we'll see what we can do," she added, in a more cheerful voice.

"T'ere's been some little unpleasantness between Miss Musgrave and Mr Smythe, I'm t'inkin'," she whispered to Drake later on in the day.

His face hardened. "How? When?" he asked, sharply.

"Dear, dear! it's nothing to speak of, Mr Drake. *She*"—so Mrs Trevose generally in-

licated Mrs Musgrave—"She's been borrowin' money from him and his friends (t' way t'ey all do)," she added, in parenthesis. Drake nodded. "I don't know what t' upshot was, but he's had some conversation with Miss Musgrave, and she came out t'at white and tremblin'"—she looked at Drake out of the corner of her eye as she said this. "He's gone out—won't be back to dinner, he says."

Drake made no reply. He watched Betty that evening when she came in to dinner, but he made no attempt to speak to her. Mrs Musgrave did not appear at all. For some days past she had been in a very excited state. Betty had feared to speak to her at all about the matter. "There is no use," she thought; "she will not speak the truth." She had wondered for some weeks how her mother had got the money, which she evidently made use of—thinking that perhaps she was running into debt. Now that she knew, she felt that words were wasted. It was better to bear it quietly, without adding to her pain by scenes of angry recrimination. She began to think how she could make the money, remembering again, with a shudder, her conversation with Madam Marchand. But, somehow or other, she must contrive to get the whole sum at once. They had no credit. She no longer possessed any ornaments that she could sell. All she had in the world was three pounds left in the bank.

She sat in her own room that night, long after her mother had gone to bed, until the fire

died down in the grate, and the piercing cold recalled her to a sense that the night was half gone. She rose then with a shiver, and, taking up Mr Wentworth's letter, she re-read what he had written.

Mrs Wentworth was the only friend that she had. Betty wondered now why it was that she had not opened her heart to her long ago, and told her everything. She would do it now. She would go to St Julliets the very next morning, and tell her the whole truth. With a sense of relief she remembered the old lady's wise and tender face. She had one friend after all. She folded the letter, and put it under her pillow—and dreamed that she saw Mrs Wentworth beside her.

The next morning she came down early, and told Mrs Trevoise that she was going to St Julliets at once.

"I know of someone there—a lady, who is a cousin of my father's, who will lend me the money that I want. She is very kind. I will tell her everything. Will you take care of my mother?"

"I'll look after her, dear," said Mrs Trevoise. "I'll see t'at she doesn't go out alone, darlin'. She's in t' very excited condition. She'll be wantin' away, but I'll look after t'at." She looked at Betty. "Mr Smythe's not returned to-day, dear. He's sent a note to say t'at he's lost a *valuable* diamond ring, and he seems in t' great excitement about it."

Betty scarcely heard her. She was looking up the trains for St Julliot's, and making a hurried breakfast, longing to get away as soon as possible.

She went upstairs to see her mother before going out. Mrs Musgrave had breakfasted in her own room, and was sitting half-dressed, in a kind of stupor, when she came up. She asked no questions about where Betty was going, only followed her movements with an apathetic glance, sighing now and then as if in pain. "Do you feel ill, mother?" the girl asked, bending down over her, when she was ready to go.

Mrs Musgrave shook her head. "Go away and enjoy yourself, child. Leave me! leave me!"

"Oh! you know that I am only going away for a few hours—to see Mrs Wentworth, because she is ill. Mrs Trevoise will take a walk with you, if you want to go," said Betty, starting for a moment at the low, fierce laugh with which her mother echoed the words:

"Go out with me! Mrs Trevoise! Yes, yes; of course, I'm to be watched and spied upon every moment. Go away; I do not want to go; I want to be left alone." She rolled her head back against the chair, pushing Betty away from her with her dry, hot hands.

The girl bit her lips to restrain the tears that gathered in her eyes. Throwing a shawl round her mother's shoulders, and shading her eyes from the light, she took her purse and went downstairs. She had to borrow the money for

the journey from Mrs Trevese. "You'll be back in t' evening, darlin'; and keep your mind easy about *her*. I'll not let her *cross t' threshold* without myself, darlin'."

Betty pressed her hand in silence, and went away.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE journey was not a very long one. Betty arrived at St Julliets early in the afternoon.

It was a day of winter sunshine, with sparkling frost. Every blade of grass was hoary, and the air felt in the throat like wine. All the way as she came along, the girl had been gathering up in her heart what she was going to say. She had been a fool, she thought, not to have trusted Mrs Wentworth, and told her the whole truth long ago. Now she would tell her everything, not sparing herself one detail. "She will help me, I know that she will," she thought. She even fancied her own sense of relief when she could sink down and hide her face on Mrs Wentworth's knee, listening to her kind voice. . . . She looked about her as the train drew up at the little station—there was no one there that she knew.

Without lingering for a moment, anxious to get to the Rectory, she stepped out on the hard road.

As she went up the hill, her heart seemed to beat in her ears, and her eyes grew dim. She was already fatigued by her sleepless night and her anxiety, but she hurried on without slackening her speed. "Oliver! I hope I may not meet

him. O God! do not let me meet him—have I not enough to bear without that,” she prayed.

It was quite a short way from the station to the Rectory, not a mile, and she knew the road well; yet it seemed to Betty as if she would never get there, for a sense of impotence oppressed her, as when one tries to hurry in a dream, and speed is impossible.

At last she reached the top of the hill, and saw the two huge clipped yew trees, one on each side of the white gate. The gate stood open. Betty hurried up the broad, straight walk, her light footsteps making no more sound than a withered leaf drifted over the hard path. The blinds inside the house were all down—to keep out the sunshine, she supposed. The hall door stood wide open, and the house was very quiet. “Oh, she is sitting in her own room, alone, perhaps, or she may be well enough now to have come downstairs: she is in the drawing-room,” she thought. Without ringing the bell, she stepped in, and opened the drawing-room door. Mrs Wentworth was not there. As she turned away, the housemaid appeared in the hall. Recognising Betty at once, she came up to her, saying, “Oh, Miss Musgrave, you’re come too late!”

“Too late for what, Eliza? Is Mrs Wentworth worse?”

“She died this morning,” said the maid, turning away to hide her tears. Betty stood still, feeling as if a great hard hand had caught hold of her heart, and was crushing it so that she could not

breathe. After a minute, the maid recovered herself, and continued, "It was at four o'clock this morning—such a night of pain as she had, miss—we were glad to let her go. The rector, he'll see no one; but perhaps you would be different."

"No, no! I couldn't see him. Don't tell him I am here," said the girl; "but," she said, turning to the maid, "I want to see—her—again. Take me upstairs, Eliza—if he is not there—I should like to see her again."

She followed the maid upstairs, waiting while she softly opened the door of the room and looked in.

"There is no one there, Miss Musgrave; will you come in," she whispered, and Betty entered the quiet room that was flooded with summer-like sunshine through the yellow blinds.

She could not see for a moment after the maid had gently uncovered the face of the figure that lay on the bed. Then, as her eyes grew clearer, she stood, forgetting her own trouble, gazing down at the white face that seemed to understand all mysteries and all knowledge; from the pale brow the lines of age had almost vanished, and although not nine hours had passed, sorrow seemed long, so long—forgotten, for on the sealed lips there still hovered a little curious smile, such as one smiles who remembers something intimate and very sweet.

Betty dropped upon her knees, gazing at it, as if she could pierce the secret of what had

stamped that last expression there, before the spirit went away.

The maid bent down at last, touching her shoulder. Betty rose, and tenderly covered the face again. She heard a step at the door, but had not time to move away before Mr Wentworth came in. Deep lines were drawn on his round red face—his eyes stared blindly in front of him—he looked at Betty blankly as she spoke, and the hand he held out to her was limp and cold.

"I ought to know you, my dear," he said; then rubbed his hand across his eyes. "She's gone away and left me—" Betty lifted the cold hand to her lips and kissed it, the tears falling from her eyes as she did so. "Ah, I remember—Betty Musgrave. She loved you, my dear." He let her hand fall and turned away, and Betty slipped quietly out of the room. A great awe had fallen upon her: a great sense of triumph, too—for what love such suffering meant!—the world where such things were had salvation in it, after all. She went slowly down the stair, and found the maid waiting for her in the hall.

"You're not going away like this, Miss Musgrave?" she said; "you must stay, and let me get a room ready for you."

"No; I cannot stay. I must go away now. Good-bye, Eliza; I shall never forget what I have seen," said Betty.

She left the house again, without food or rest, and took her way back to the station alone.

Out-of-doors the air was nearly as still as in

the quiet house that she had left ; only, faintly, far away came the sound of clinking iron from the village forge. Betty went slowly ; she had no need to hurry now. There were holly bushes in the hedge on each side of the road, gay with their scarlet berries. She saw a line of wild swans flying up from the frozen river. The very frost on the grasses was shining with different soft colours. She could hear her own heart beat, as she went between the hedgerows alone. Then round the corner came a boy released from the choir practice, singing snatches of a carol to himself, and shying stones,

“God rest you, merry gentlemen,
May nothing you dismay ;
God rest—you, merry—gentlemen——”

He broke off to stare at Betty as she passed, and went on, shrilly,

“With one stone at thy heels, good man
And one stone at thy head——”

There was someone else coming now. The sun struck full in Betty’s eyes, but she knew who it was long before he came up to her.

“How did you come here?” he began, then remembering about Mrs Wentworth, he exclaimed, “I know—you had heard this morning !”

Betty stopped, because, although she would fain have hurried on, Oliver stood in front of her. She tried to answer him, but her voice failed. She bent her head so that he might not see her face.

"Ah! you did not know till you reached the house. You have had a shock," he said, looking down at her. "You are not going back to town now, surely! You are not fit for it. You must come back with me—my mother will be glad—"

"No, thank you. I must go home—I must really; I cannot possibly stay—Oh! please let me go on," she said, for Oliver had laid his hand on her arm, as if to detain her. He bent forwards, trying to look at her face, then took her hands in his.

"You are in trouble—you are ill—I cannot bear it. Betty! Betty! let me help you!"

What he might have gone on to say, Betty did not wait to hear. She drew her hands away, and looked up at him, speaking in a low, cold voice. "You cannot help me. I came here to see Mrs Wentworth, and now, even she cannot help me any longer—please let me go on."

"But you have no one—" began Oliver, eagerly. "You have not a father or a brother—"

Betty laughed—a short, hard laugh—and stood for a moment looking down, then raised her eyes again. "No," she said; "I have not. I have learnt now that when God leaves a woman alone in the world without father or brother—if she is young—and—not ugly—He means her to learn what men are." She turned away, and Oliver, standing still where she left him, watched her till she was out of sight.

Betty walked quickly now. When she came to the little station, she sat down on a bench

outside, never noticing the freezing cold, as the sun descended, and the evening began to darken. A man came out to ask her if she would not go in beside the fire. "No, thank you; I do not feel the cold," she answered. Indeed, it did not "bite so nigh" as the chill at her heart. When at last she got into the train, she leaned back, alone in the carriage, and whispered to herself: "*Lover and friend—Lover and friend—hast Thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness.*"

CHAPTER XXXIII

MRS TREVOSE was waiting for the girl on her return; she opened the door herself, and drew Betty into her own sitting-room.

"Dear, dear! As cold as ice, darlin', and as white as death! Sit down, sit ye down, and drink a drop of t'is," she said, producing some whisky from a cupboard; and pouring out a mouthful, offered it to her.

Betty pushed it away, and shook her head. She leaned her arm on the table, and lifted her veil, "I have been able to do nothing, Mrs Trevoze. Mrs Wentworth died last night." She covered her eyes with her cold hand, and shivered.

"T'it's chilled to t' *bone* you are, darlin'! I'll away to fetch you a cup of tea—and t'en you'll tell me all. *She—*" with a significant look—"she was in t' very excited condition all mornin'—she's had some, dear, however she's got it. I persuaded her to lie down, and she said t'at she would sleep. She's been as quiet as a mouse all t' afternoon, for I was up twice to t' back of t' door to listen. T' key's safe in my pocket: she'll be all right when she wakens."

She slipped from the room, and Betty did not move nearer to the fire, but sat still with her hand covering her eyes.

Mrs Trevoise returned in a minute or two—not with tea—her face was pale. “Oh, dear!” she gasped, still retaining presence of mind enough to close the door as she spoke. “She’s gone, darlin’! gone off—out by t’ window—down by t’ ’en-house roof to t’ lane—not a sign of her!”

Betty rose wildly. “Come, come with me—you must be mistaken.” She ran upstairs without waiting for the woman to follow her. The bedroom was all in disorder; the gas flaring high; the window wide open. Betty ran to it looking out into the clear night. There was not a sign of life in the little garden. “Mother! mother! are you there?” she called.

“Hush, hush, darlin’!” said Mrs Trevoise, who came panting up behind her. “She’s not t’ere; I’ve been out myself to see. T’is easy to climb from t’ window on to t’ flat roof, and t’en to drop gently from t’ wall. T’ door of t’ garden was standin’ open all t’ afternoon for t’ man t’at was mendin’ t’ nettin’. T’at must have suggested it to her—seein’ him off for his tea. T’is *wonderful* t’ agility t’ey have at times!”

“Oh, come with me! I must go and find her—has she any money?”

Mrs Trevoise sunk her voice, “I felt t’ purse in her pocket, dear, when I gave her my arm upstairs, but she was wide awake t’en, I thought maybe I’d get hold of it after she was asleep—t’it was heavy—she’s maybe been sellin’ something, has she? T’ey’ll part with *anything* when t’ey’re like t’at.”

"Oh, don't," cried the girl, involuntarily; then she seized Mrs Trevoise by the arm, and pulled her from the room. "Come with me! I must go at once. Oh, think what may have happened! Come, come!"

"Darlin', one moment—only till I get on t' bonnet and speak to Louisa. Go in t'ere, dear." She motioned Betty towards her own sitting-room, and ran upstairs with noiseless, elastic tread.

Betty could not sit down. She stood pressing her hand over her eyes, trying to collect her thoughts enough to know what she ought to do first. She turned round when the door opened expecting to see Mrs Trevoise, saying, "Oh, are you ready?" But it was Drake who entered. He shut the door, and came up to her with one hand in his pocket in his rough, swaggering manner, but his face was red, and there were tears in his eyes. He made no apology, but addressed her abruptly, "Miss Musgrave, this is a bad business."

"What do you know about it," Betty began, her lips quivering with pain and anger; "what right has everyone in the house to come and speak to me like this!"

"Now, now, now," said the man, and he took Betty by the shoulders, pushed her into the arm-chair, and sitting down beside her took up her cold hands in his great hard ones, and held them tight. "There, don't cry—be brave, child—now, now, you'll be better in a minute." Then seeing the whisky on the table, he took the glass and

held it to her lips. Betty tried to refuse. "Non-sense! come away—take it—there now, you'll be all right in a minute."

He sat still with one hand in his pocket, holding Betty's two hands with the other, never looking at her, till she said faintly, "Thank you, I'm better now."

Then he wheeled round on his chair, and looked at her, "Miss Musgrave, you must not be angry with me. Mrs Trevoise told me all about this. She told me that you had found your friend dead—was that true?"

Betty nodded.

"You have no one here to help you. Will you allow me to do so? I'll go to that fellow and settle everything—trust me—you can pay me afterwards."

"I have no money. I cannot pay anything."

"Well, well—we'll settle about that afterwards. Now, Mrs Trevoise tells me that your mother has gone off. You want to go and find her. That shouldn't be difficult, but it's no work for you. I'll do it. I'll take Mrs Trevoise with me, and we'll bring her back all safe before morning. Now, you'll be good, and stay here—you're not fit to come."

"I am," said Betty, getting up, and beginning to put on her gloves. "I'm going now. Take me with you."

"You've been a journey. You're dead beat. I doubt if you've had any food to-day?"

"I couldn't eat."

"Well," he said, "look here ; let me send Mrs Trevoise with some food to you, and eat it, like a good girl ; and I'll go and get a cab, and take you with me when I come back. Will you do that, now?" he asked, sharply.

Betty nodded, and he went out.

In a few minutes Mrs Trevoise came up and she coaxed the girl to eat and drink. Betty did not taste the food, but she managed to swallow a few mouthfuls, and to drink a cup of tea.

Drake came in again, and Mrs Trevoise wrapped her up in a shawl. "Are you wantin' me to come with you, darlin'?" she asked.

Drake waited for Betty to speak. She looked at him. "No ; he will take care of me," she said. The man drew a deep breath of satisfaction as he followed her out to the cab.

"We'll go to the police office first," he said—"they'll know something there, very likely ; then to the public-houses." Betty shuddered.

They drove in silence for a little ; then he said, "Perhaps you'd better speak to Mr Smythe yourself, Miss Musgrave. I'll give you the money."

"Oh, no, no, no!" cried Betty. "I can never speak to him again!"

"Why not? He wasn't rude to *you*?" asked Drake.

Betty kept silence.

"What did he say?" he asked again.

Betty made no reply.

"Won't you tell me?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because he insulted me. I can't repeat it."

"Oh!" said Drake, slowly. "He did — did he!" He sat looking out into the night streets, apparently lost in thought. Then they came to the police office, where he asked Betty to wait in the cab, and went in.

Half-an-hour passed; then he came out along with two policemen.

"It's all right, I think," he said. "We've got a clue. I'll find her. Now, this man will take you home, and I'll return as soon as I can."

"I won't go home."

"Oh yes, you shall; these are no places for you to see. You can do no good. Get in," he said to the policeman, "and take this lady home. Give this note to the woman at the house, and tell her I'll be back in an hour or so."

Betty did not resist. She allowed him to wrap her up again, and they drove away.

She gazed out with vacant eyes upon the roaring lighted streets; the figures before the flaring shops seemed no more to her than flies against a window pane. She could not think or make any further effort, only to herself she said, "God has forgotten me, God has forgotten me!" over and over again.

At last the cab stopped, and Mrs Trevoise was helping her out with her little, warm, greasy hands, whispering to the policeman to follow her into the house.

She spoke to him for a moment in the hall,

then led Betty upstairs. She had lighted a fire in the bedroom, and persuaded the girl to take off her hat and dress and lie down. Then she sat beside her, and soothed and patted her as if she had been a child. Betty closed her eyes with a long sigh. Before a few minutes had passed she was in deep sleep.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE grey light of morning came crawling in at the window before Betty awoke. She opened her eyes, and gazed wildly about her for a moment in half-bewildered recollection.

The fire had burned low in the grate; and Mrs Trevose, who was bending over it, turned round at the sound of Betty's voice, coming quickly to her side.

"T'it's mornin' now, darlin', and you've had a sound sleep; and Mrs Musgrave, she's *safe* home again *long ago*."

"Where? where? Is she all right?"

"All right, darlin'! Mr Drake, he fetched her home t'at quiet, about one in t' mornin'; *not a soul* in t' house heard anything of t' occurrence. I said last night t'at she'd gone on t' *little expedition*,—so she had,—and Mrs Levison inquired no further. T'ose high-strung natures are *so easily* upset! You lie still, darlin', and take another hour in bed, and have t' strong cup of tea, and you'll find things is better by t' mornin' light."

Betty lay down again, and closed her eyes without a word; but she could sleep no more.

It seemed to her as if the daylight lagged hour by hour,—as if morning would never come again.

At last, however, she heard the sound of the

household stirring below, and got up, thankful to escape from her own thoughts. Mrs Trevoise had taken Mrs Musgrave to her own bedroom when she came in in the early morning. There Betty found her, sitting cowering by the fireside, her hair hanging over her shoulders, her eyes wild from a sleepless night. When the girl entered, she rose unsteadily to her feet, with a defiant expression on her face.

"You've come to taunt me, I suppose, Betty," she said.

"No, mother—oh, no; but I don't know what to do."

Betty came up to her and gently took her hand and led her back to her seat. As she touched the clammy hand, and saw on the hearth-rug a pair of mud-splashed shoes, kicked off there the night before, she wondered for a moment where her mother had been found; but that thought was what she could not bear.

"Have you not been asleep at all, mother? You must come to your own room now; you will feel better when you have washed your face and had some breakfast."

Mrs Musgrave paid no attention to what she said. She tried again to rise from her chair. "We must leave this!" she cried; "I cannot stand it. The atmosphere of this house is degrading you, Betty; you are no longer what you were. Association with low people has corrupted you; you are full of vile suspicions—yes, even of your own mother; but I call God to witness——!"

"Mother," said the girl, kneeling by her chair, and endeavouring to calm her. "There is no use in speaking any more about this. I know all about it. I will do all that I can to make things right, to pay back the money to Mr Smythe."

Mrs Musgrave turned to her with a smile that frightened Betty more than fury would have done. "Mr Smythe admires you so much, Betty. He has told me often. He is a good deal older than you are; but he is very well off——"

"Be quiet!" cried the girl. "If you ever say another word like that, I'll never speak to you again!"

She ran out of the room trembling with anger and humiliation. "Where is Mr Drake, Mrs Trevoise? I must see him this morning," she said, having found Mrs Trevoise downstairs.

"Go to t' drawin'-room, dear, and I'll send him along to speak with you. T'ey're all out just now. Mrs Levison is not up yet: you'll be quite alone."

Betty waited for a few minutes. She went forward at once when Drake came into the room, holding out her hand.

"I have to thank you for your great kindness last night," she said. He was going to speak, but she stopped him. "Don't tell me, please, anything about it—that's not necessary; I can't bear it."

"We found her quite easily. She was not willing to come back with me; that was the difficulty." He paused and hesitated; then taking

a step nearer to her, he went on: "As for that business with Mr Smythe, you'll just let me arrange that, won't you?"

"I can't," Betty began; but in a tone of entreaty he said: "Oh, do; you almost promised that you would. I'll let you pay me again; you can, whenever you like; only let me do it."

"Very well," said Betty.

"Have you promised?"

"Yes."

"Thank you," he said, drawing a breath of relief.

He stood opposite to her with the harsh morning light full on his hard, battered-looking face; just there, Betty remembered, had Oliver stood in that very room, the day he came to see her.

"Miss Musgrave," said Drake, "I have something now to say which may offend you; if it does, will you just say one word, and I'm done; I'll not speak about it again." He looked at her searchingly as he spoke, noticing the blue hollows beneath her eyes, the pallor of her face, and the way that she drooped with fatigue as she stood waiting for him to speak.

"What is it?"

"Well—it's just this," he began, plunging into his speech abruptly; "you see for yourself, and I know well enough, that I'm not the sort of man that you have been accustomed to. I've led a rough life, as I told you, a hard, rough life, and it's left its mark on me. I've been no saint—I'm not one now; however, the less you know about that the better. What I was going to say

is that you have no one, so far as I know, to protect you—your mother——”

“Don’t, please,” said Betty, hanging her head.

“Are you angry? Shall I stop?”

Betty shook her head. “I am not angry; but I cannot bear to hear her spoken of.”

“All right; now, forgive me if I make you angry, I do not mean to offend you.” He bent down nearer to her, and his voice trembled for a moment, “If you will marry me, Miss Musgrave; I’m not asking you to love me—I don’t expect that; but if you’ll just let me take care of you—give you a home,—nothing on earth shall ever, if I can help it, annoy you again.”

He paused; and Betty did not speak.

“I love you,” he went on, “as woman was never loved before, I think. I’d crawl on my knees to the world’s edge to serve you——” then suddenly changing his voice, and turning away his head half-shyly, “If you’d only give me one kind word, or let me kiss your hand—once only—though I never saw your face again, I should be blessed for ever.”

“I cannot marry you, Mr Drake,” said Betty, speaking softly, with tears in her eyes, as she held out her hand to him, “not because of anything you have said—any woman, I think, might be proud to do so—but because I——”

“Yes, yes; I see—there’s someone else—forget what I have said—don’t think of it again—only, what can I do to help you? Is there nothing that I can do?”

"You have done so much."

Betty stood for a moment, after he had gone away, remembering her contemptuous distress the first time that she had been obliged to sit at table along with this man. Then she thought how she had stood in that room after Oliver had gone. "I can never care for anyone again. My heart is hard now, like a stone. And how long life may be! Thirty years yet!" she thought.

Mrs Trevoise saw Drake go out soon afterwards. An hour later she met him again, springing up the stairs three steps at a time. His coat was torn at the right sleeve. "Look here, can you mend this somehow for me, like a good soul?" he said. His eyes were glowing, and he breathed hard.

Mrs Trevoise, without remark, took the coat, executed the repair, and brought it back to him in a short time. "I've had a busy mornin', Mr Drake," said she, "Mr Smythe, he's sent for his things—and a note to say he won't be back again to t' house any more. He doesn't allude to t' ring he thought he'd lost, so I hope he's got it all right."

"Got something else, anyway," said Drake, who was feeling the muscles on his right arm.

"And what's t'at, dear?" inquired Mrs Trevoise, closing the door with her usual caution.

"Oh, well—he's just got the biggest thrashing that ever he's had in his life—that's all."

Mrs Trevoise inquired no further. "He was t' brisk lad for his time of life," she said, "and affable in his manners, and paid his bills *most*

regular, Mr Drake. I'm sorry to hear of such a misadventure!" She smiled meaningly at Drake, and laughed a low, little, jovial chuckle to herself as she slipped gaily down the dingy stairs.

CHAPTER XXXV

BETTY drew the very last of the little money that remained in the bank, and gave it to Drake, telling him that she would pay the rest in time. She knew that he did not want to take it from her, but gave him no opportunity of refusing.

After she had done this she went straight to Madam Marchand's room. "Come in," she called, in response to Betty's knock. Betty entered, to find her sitting in a faded satin petticoat, pulling on the long lace stockings (with holes in them) in which she gave her dancing lessons. Her gentle, languid face with its sunken cheeks seemed strangely at variance with her surroundings. She looked up at Betty, without speaking, with an air of kind solicitude. "Madam," said Betty, who was never able to fence about a subject, "I came to speak to you about something that you said to me once. I am in dreadful want of money. I cannot go and leave my mother, as you know. You told me once that you thought I might make something by sitting to an artist. You know some of them. Will you recommend me?"

Madam pulled the long stocking up above her knee before she replied. Then she rose and

laid her thin hand on Betty's shoulder. She had tasted the same bitterness in some degree herself, and she made no protestations. "It is hard work."

"I know that," said the girl; "But I will get accustomed to it in a little."

"And difficult to get." She looked into Betty's face for a moment, pityingly, "At first one feels—" she began, then suddenly exclaimed, "Ah! but I know something better, miss! I'll take you to see Mrs Jarvis—she—she—" hesitating for a minute—"she admired you that much when she saw you here. She's always busy, and she's very kind."

Betty looked grave. "Won't you come, miss? I'll take you now. I've an hour to spare before my lesson. She's always busy in the afternoon. Will you come?"

"Yes," said Betty; "I'll come."

Ten minutes later they left the house together. Betty thought as she sat in the corner of the 'bus that they rode on for hours—but at last Madam touched her arm, and rose to get out. They alighted at a broad walled road, where trees appeared above the walls on either side. They walked a short way along, and turned down into another lane, where Madam stopped by a garden gate. The house had trees about it, and the glass of a studio was visible from the road.

Betty trembled so, that she could scarcely follow her companion along the covered way that led

up from the gate to the house. They waited in the hall for a few minutes, then were shown up a back stair into a tiny ante-room, chiefly filled with screens and old canvases. "Sit down, miss, sit down," said the woman, pushing the only chair towards Betty.

They waited in silence for a few minutes longer ; then a step came down the wooden steps that led from the studio door, and Mrs Jarvis entered slowly. She wore a great linen overall that covered her from head to foot, and had a yellow handkerchief tied across her brow. "Oh, it's you, Polly," she said, standing in the doorway. "Do you want anything ; I'm very busy."

Madam, with kindly tact, stepped in front of Betty, saying, "May I speak to you at the door?"

They left the room, and talked for a few seconds in the passage. Then Mrs Jarvis came back. She walked right up to Betty, laying one of her clay-soiled hands on her wrist, speaking in her low, laughing voice. "Come away, my little one—very frightened you are! I'm not going to eat you. Come away into my den, and let me look at you. Go away, Polly—I don't want you."

Betty followed her into the studio, a great, bare place, where she worked her models in clay. Opening off it there was a small room into which she led the girl without speaking. This was warm, with a fire, and had a ferocity of untidiness that took Betty's breath away. Everything was tossed or piled about anywhere. A great chair covered

with a dazzling, scarlet cloth stood near the fire, and Mrs Jarvis motioned to Betty to sit down. She herself sat down on the hearthstone—a marble one—and raked the wood fire together till it blazed. There was a little saucepan on the fire, containing milk, that boiled over, making a great splutter. She lifted it off, and began to scrape the clay from her fingers, looking at Betty all the time. "You want to come here and sit for me—or rather you don't want to, but you must make some money. You won't make your fortune by that! But come, come; I want you. You're beautiful; you're all lines together. Shake yourself about a bit, and don't sit so stiffly." She leant her head back, looking at Betty through half-closed eyes. "It's Persephone—come up again for a day. Yes, I see; I see. You'll come on Monday." She bent over the saucepan. "Have a little boiled milk now? You look tired. No? Well, I'll have it after you're gone. And how's Mrs Trevoise? She's a good soul, Mrs Trevoise."

"She is indeed. She has been so kind to me," said Betty, who was beginning to recover from her first shock of surprise and looking about her. As she looked, one strange object or another detached itself from the surrounding muddle, and struck her fancy. A bridle hanging from a nail; a mandolin; a long human bone poking from under a heap of embroideries in a corner; a water melon by the hearth—then her eyes became fixed on a little clay model of a young man struggling with a ram. Mrs Jarvis followed the direction of her glance.

"That's Isaac," she said, "with the ram that was caught in the thicket. D'you ever read your Bible?"

"Did you do that?" Betty inquired. She nodded.

Even Betty's ignorant eyes could see the extraordinary force of the thing, the movement and alarming originality of it, though it lacked, as nearly all feminine work must do, the calm of the greatest art.

"We were speaking about Mrs Trevose," Mrs Jarvis went on, having dismissed the subject of Isaac with a flutter of her hands, and the remark, "I know what it ought to have been. I know always what it ought to be—perhaps in another life I'll be a man, and able to do it. Don't you go away and say that to the next woman artist you meet, now. It's a bad thing to have no tact; that's Mrs Trevose's strong point——" she broke off, and gazed vacantly before her for a minute, "If the righteous scarcely be saved . . . I hope they'll find a corner for her somehow. Do you want to go away now. Why are you looking at the door?" She did not chatter, but spoke slowly, with reflective pauses every now and then, and as if she thought of every word that she said.

"There is someone in the studio; that is why I was looking at the door," said Betty.

Mrs Jarvis leaned forwards, so as to look through the open door of the little room. "I often have men — people who come in to

see my models and so on. Who is it?—I can't see."

"It's a short man with black hair."

"That's only Mr Jarvis, then," she said, sinking back into her former position on the hearth, adding casually, "A very useful person. Very unobtrusive." She talked on for a few minutes longer; then Betty rose to go. "You'll come back again on Monday—and sit for me then, won't you? I'll not tire you out. I'll give you five shillings an hour."

"Is that——?" Betty began.

"Yes, yes; that's all right. Must you go? Well, come this way." She pushed open a door in the wall, and Betty found herself on a balcony from which a light stair ran down to the garden. "There, go that way. Then you won't need to speak to Mr Jarvis. He is tiresome at times. Good-bye."

Betty went away, drawing down her veil, and feeling as if everyone she passed in the street were staring at her. When she got home, her mother upbraided her for having left her so long alone.

"You are absorbed in your amusements and affairs, Betty. You never think about me. I am nowhere, of course."

CHAPTER XXXVI

BETTY went to Mrs Jarvis's studio every day. At first her mother made no inquiries as to where she had been when she came in, but after a few days had passed she asked why she "always stayed out for such a long while now?" Betty told her that a friend of Mrs Trevose's, who was an artist, had asked if she would sit for her. She did not mention payment; and Mrs Musgrave merely grumbled at the idea, saying that Betty would "take any trouble for strangers, and do nothing for her own mother."

Mrs Trevose had promised the girl to keep a strict watch over Mrs Musgrave while she was absent. Betty felt more at ease, for she had begun to know that an outbreak, such as the last had been, was generally followed by a period of calm and good intentions: the intervals between were getting shorter and shorter, but just for the present there was some improvement. Mrs Musgrave even tried to occupy herself: would read half through a novel, lent to her by Mrs Levison, or sew for half-an-hour at some long-neglected bit of work.

Betty found the position she had to stand in very trying at first; by the time ten minutes were over every limb in her body ached. Mrs

Jarvis was considerate, and allowed her to rest frequently. She often let her off a part of the time, insisting upon her taking the full payment for the hour.

By-and-by, as her first dread and humiliation subsided, Betty came to enjoy the hours she spent in that great, bare room: hours of almost total silence, for the woman did not speak to her as she worked. Then when the time was up, Mrs Jarvis took her into the little ante-room, and there (sitting always on the floor) she would talk until the girl was obliged to tear herself unwillingly away as the afternoon began to darken.

It was the beginning to her of a new phase in life, as if, in the dark room of her existence, a door had suddenly been thrown open, leading into a garden full of life and warmth. Betty was not intellectual, neither had she any degree of the "artistic temperament" with which Mrs Trevoise excused her mother's failings, but she had a strong, intelligent mind and a sensitive nature. She now began for the first time to understand the existence of art and letters—as art and letters could be touched upon by Mrs Jarvis. Morality and religion were words not to be found in her dictionary; love, a "broken cistern that could hold no water," still there burned in her an enthusiasm for things that were not her own:

"The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow,
The devotion to something afar . . ."

a kind of thing that had never touched Betty in life before. She would sit and talk away, telling the girl tales of her early youth, her work for the stage, her hopes and failures and successes.

"I sewed newspapers together"—she paused and shivered, and continued slowly—"sewed old newspapers together to make a blanket to keep me warm at night . . . but my heart was singing in my dreams then!" She looked at Betty, laughing. "The world was much too exciting; every day was like the opening of an new act, and night only the falling of the curtain before the next one. I thought I could do anything in those days; and then——"

"Then?" Betty asked, bending forward in her eagerness.

"Then—oh, Blue Eyes!—happened all sorts of things, that you know nothing about." She paused, and began rubbing the clay off her fingers. "You never were in love—eh?" she asked suddenly, looking up at Betty, who made no reply. "Well—it's a fine thing while it lasts; but there are things in the world that outlast that. My love—my lover—left me; but the other thing I wanted—the art I followed—was there all the same—as dear, as far away, as possible to attain to as ever—more so, because I had nothing to hinder me in pursuing it. I'll never come near—I'll never do anything even that satisfies me for a moment; but it is there unchangeable. Ah! you don't understand a word of what I'm saying. You consider the things I

do lovely, don't you? You think it a very nice thing to be able to paint on china, perhaps? Yes, yes; of course, so it is; and no reasonable person would ever care to have written *Paradise Lost*."

"I don't know what you are talking about now," said Betty with a smile.

"No, no—of course you don't; you are made quite differently. But now I'm going to give you some books to take home."

Betty took the books obediently, feeling as if she were not in the least inclined to read. It was by almost imperceptible degrees that she began to comprehend that a new interest had sprung up in her life; that she had found a place where the storms that might blow outside could not stir the air. Mrs Jarvis gave her books that took her far away from herself. She began to understand them a little, and it lessened the strain of her life wonderfully. Between Mrs Jarvis and herself a friendship of a somewhat curious quality sprung up. Betty regarded her from over a fence, as it were—an attitude which amused the older woman not a little. "Come out," she said, one day when Betty had been sitting looking at her gravely. It was an afternoon when the light had failed suddenly, and Betty sat on the little raised platform, having moved her position so as to be able to look at Mrs Jarvis as she talked on. The girl turned, leaning her chin on the palm of her hand, the thin white draperies that she wore wound closely

about her beautiful body, defining the unconscious grace of her attitude. "Ah! stay that way—don't move; there, you've gone wrong in a moment. If you had only stayed five minutes as you were!" exclaimed Mrs Jarvis. "You didn't know what I meant by asking you to come out a minute ago," she went on. "I meant this—that you always speak to me from behind a grating. You never forget for one moment that you're a good woman, and that I'm what the world——"

"Don't. Please do not say that," said Betty, stretching out her white arm in the thin muslin sleeve, as if to stop the words on her lips.

Mrs Jarvis smeared a clay-stained hand across her face, regarding the girl with a smile that showed all her sound teeth. "What a thin-skinned little thing you are! I will not say it, then. But you never forget, do you?"

Betty blushed, and looked down, smoothing the muslin folds where her draperies flowed down over the elbow of the chair, then looked up with a steady glance at the other woman, and replied gravely, "No; I do not think I do."

The work went on in silence for a time afterwards. Then they spoke of other things. As Betty was standing drawing on her gloves, ready to leave when the time was up, Mrs Jarvis said to her quickly, "Some day, Betty—when you are married, and happy, like the heroine of a good story—you'll remember me?" There was a break in her voice as she spoke,

Betty took her hand. "You don't know how you hurt me when you say things like that," she said. "I have been brought up one way, and you another; and I know that I do not understand you in some ways." Mrs Jarvis laughed and Betty hesitated. "I can't understand how you can be happy at all, for instance, when your husband——"

The woman let her hand fall with a grimace. "Mr Jarvis! You call *him* my husband! Poor little thing! He's very little trouble, certainly; but I did not think that you were so stupid as to suppose that anything——" she stopped, drawing her breath quickly. "Go away, Blue Eyes—go away now, and think how nice it is to be good." Betty turned her tragic eyes upon her as she stood in the doorway, and went away out into the darkness in silence.

She went home alone, as she always did, not being afraid of going about by herself, as she used to be. Many people looked at her in the streets, but no one annoyed her; and she was unconscious of the notice that she sometimes attracted in spite of her quiet dress. It was notice chiefly from people who would not stare at her rudely. She had gone half-way home that evening when she met Drake. "May I walk back with you?" he asked; and Betty could not refuse the request. She had scarcely spoken two words to him for weeks past, but she quite liked his presence now. As he walked along beside her, suiting his pace to hers, she glanced up

at him for a moment, and he smiled down at her without speaking. They came to a quieter part of the street. He bent down, saying, in his rough, abrupt way, "Now, what is it that you have got to do? Teaching? You go out nearly every afternoon."

"I am glad to be able to make even a little money," Betty answered, without looking up.

"Yes, I daresay; it's not easy to do so—for anyone that hasn't been brought up to work. What have you got?"

"I don't make very much . . . but it is not hard work," said Betty, quickening her steps.

"Makes you pale enough, anyhow. What do you teach? English, or music, or what?"

"I—I—it's rather cold to-night—let us walk faster."

"You haven't answered my question," said Drake, in a low voice, looking at her hard.

Betty grew desperate. "I do not mean to answer it."

He stopped short, so that Betty had to stop also. They were passing by the high blank wall of some public building—the only people on the pavement at the moment. "Come," he said; "you've got to tell me this. I do not want to be rude; but you have no one on earth to look after you, and—I can do it, if you'll allow me. Tell me now?"

Betty cast down her eyes. She trusted him; she liked him; but she resented his interference, as she named it to herself. In reality, she was

afraid to tell him. "I go to Mrs Jarvis's studio," she said at last.

He turned to walk by her side again, Betty hoping that he would ask no more questions. "And what do *you* do—at Mrs Jarvis's studio—that she pays you for?"

Betty did not reply for a moment, then answered distinctly, "I sit for her—she pays me so much an hour."

"Does it tire you?"

"Sometimes; not so much now."

"What do you wear?"

He looked round at her, speaking so sharply that Betty started. Then, seeing his face, she answered, colouring a little, "Sometimes my usual dress—sometimes a white muslin thing that she likes."

They had reached the door of the house now. Something, as she spoke the last words, made Betty tremble. Drake was still looking down at her. She lifted her hand and laid it for an instant on his arm, giving him one of her soft childlike glances as she did so. "It's all right; please, don't mind—I must do something—it is better than being always at home with——"

"Yes, yes; but I'll be—I mean you won't do that again if I can help it."

"I do not see how you can help it." She thought she heard him groan to himself as he followed her into the dark lobby. He did not speak to her again that evening.

Mrs Musgrave said, "How that dreadful man

sits and stares at you during dinner, Betty; I must speak to Mrs Trevoise about it."

"Who do you mean, mother?"

"Mr Drake. He is so ugly and rude."

"I never notice if he looks at me. I do not mind if he does," Betty answered. "I dislike Mrs Levison's staring at me much more than that."

CHAPTER XXXVII

OLIVER and Mr Wentworth sat alone together in the little dining-room at the Rectory. The tablecloth had been removed, as was the custom of the house, and the plate of red apples, and the two low candlesticks that stood on the table, were dimly reflected in the black wood. Mr Wentworth's chair was turned to the fire; his glass of wine stood untasted at his elbow—he had filled it only to keep the young man company. His face was kind, and shrewd, and red as ever; but there was a look in it now that told that his own part in life was done. His hand trembled as he motioned to Oliver to draw his chair nearer.

"It's like this, sir," Oliver began—then looking up; "but how can I come here and talk to you about my affairs now."

"Go on, go on, Oliver. She always loved you; I love you double for her sake now."

Oliver bowed his head in silence.

"I am left a little longer, perhaps," said the old man, "that I may learn some things now—alone. I've nothing to do but think of others now; for the walls of my house are in the dust, Oliver. Go on, go on."

"Well, sir, as I said, it's like this—she's good

—she's high-minded—she's womanly, and all that's charming, and I'm not worthy to tie her shoe; but—well, I remember once when I was ill, as a little boy, and my mother used to tempt me with everything that she could think of, the best, the most delicate food, well cooked and nourishing—but I just couldn't eat it."

"I perfectly understand. But the question is, Oliver, not so much what you feel for Kathleen, as whether you feel differently about anyone else?"

Oliver made no answer. He lifted the bottle and poured himself out another glass of wine. The rector sat looking into the fire.

"What shall I say, sir?"

"Nothing, unless you like," said the old man. "The truth—if you want my opinion."

"I think you know it already."

"No, Oliver; I hope I do not. I have too great a regard for you to believe that if you loved the girl you speak of you would have behaved as you have done."

Oliver turned to him. "I know, sir, you think that. Indeed, I did not know myself how deep it had gone until it was too late. The day I saw her in London . . . with her mother—was such a surprise to me, that I felt as if I had got a blow on the head. Then I thought I could forget it all, and that if I had given my word to another woman it would be all right."

"And now you find that it isn't?"

"I find it's—— I've never known what it was to be wretched before—and it's hopeless."

"Are you sure that you love her this time, Oliver?"

"Sure!" laughed Oliver, wincing at his tone. "Yes; I'm quite sure. Ask a man who's dying of an incurable disease if he's sure he's ill."

"The simile is unpleasant," said the rector. He begun to speak presently, without looking at Oliver. "Well, Oliver Lacy, I'm going to give you my opinion as you have asked for it. You may take it for what it's worth. It's that of an old man who has nothing more to gain in this life, either from joy or sorrow. I have seen much of both, and this I tell you: If you love one woman and marry another, you do a great wrong to both of them, and you can never hope to be anything but miserable."

"God knows I'm miserable enough now," groaned Oliver, who had covered his face with his hands.

"You must not spare yourself," said the old man, smiling a little as he glanced at Oliver. "It won't be exactly easy to explain your position—when you do I'm afraid you will find it a lower one than most people of your age like to think they occupy. It's better, after all, to acknowledge that you've behaved like a scoundrel and be done with it, than to continue to do so till the end of your days."

"You are romantic, sir."

"Very possibly."

"I could not do anything so dishonourable."

"I do not relish making myself disagreeable, Oliver—one always does so when one gives advice; but, to my mind, it will be much more dishonourable in you to marry Miss Rorke than to break off your engagement to her."

"I can't," said Oliver. "Honour——"

"The common conception of honour is a showy thing—not costing much," said the rector.

"But, sir—I cannot. The mother——"

"Your own mother? Mrs Musgrave? or good Mrs Rorke?" inquired Mr Wentworth, with a twinkle.

"Oh! all three." Oliver gulped the remainder of his wine, pushed the glass away, and faced the rector with a look of despair. "My own—and Mrs Rorke. Kathleen is generous. Kathleen has known me well. I can almost believe that she would understand; but the others——!"

"Your mother will not 'understand'; you may take that for granted," said the rector—he added, "neither, I fancy, will Mrs Rorke."

Here the maid brought in their coffee. The old man tasted his and put down the cup with a trembling hand. He had spoken to Oliver calmly about his loss, now a trifle seemed more than he could bear. "It's undrinkable. I—I—*there's nothing right now!*" he burst out in sudden feeble distress; and Oliver turned quickly away that he might not see his tears.

"Good-night, sir. I must go. No, don't come to the door"; for Mr Wentworth had risen to ac-

company him to the door. When Oliver had gone he turned back into the house with a long sigh.

"*Coffee!*" said Oliver to himself, as he went quickly down the pathway, and took the short cut across the fields towards St Julliets. The frosted grass shimmered in the moonlight like a sheet of pale satin, and down below the frozen river tinkled with a rare bell-like sound under its roof of ice. Suddenly, through the quiet of the frosty night, an owl began to hoot: a minute afterwards he heard the soft, blundering whirr of its wings as it flew out from a tree when he reached the lower garden gate. Then again came its mocking call from among the trees. How it stirred the pain at his heart. "*Coffee!*" said Oliver once more. How far away—different as mounds of cloud from the hills of earth—was the untried romance of youth from a lifetime of companionship! The old man's sudden, angry, selfish distress about a trifle told him more than he had ever known before. Oliver went slowly along by the low garden terraces, where once he had walked with Betty, and cursed himself and his folly. How he had lived his life hitherto in ease and enjoyment; now he seemed to himself, all of a sudden, the most contemptible creature on God's earth. Then he remembered how Betty had looked at him when he saw her a month before; and every thought of himself was swallowed up in the rush of his anguish and desire.

Slowly he went on, up the paths of the dead

garden, between the high hedges, under the great holly that glistened in the moonshine, throwing its black shadow far out along the white ground. A still, cheerful night it was. "Whoo," he heard the owl cry again, as he climbed the steps that led to the front lawn. It seemed to call after him, and hoot like a spiteful thing laughing at him down there amongst the winter woods.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

OLIVER had gone up to London. He had spent a weary afternoon in a picture gallery along with Kathleen and his mother. Leaving them together, he had strolled off into the outer room, noticing nothing of what was exhibited there, when all of a sudden he stopped short before a little model in clay. He stood stock still before it for two minutes, then began to look up the catalogue; and seeing Mrs Lacy and Kathleen approaching him, hurriedly made a pencil mark against the artist's name and address. He did not direct their attention to the statuette that had attracted him; but Kathleen noticed that he answered her quite at random. They met an artist, a man with whom Oliver was slightly acquainted, and he turned aside to speak with him. "Look here," he said eagerly, showing him the marked name; "do you know who this is? I want to buy some of her work."

"Jarvis? Mrs Jarvis? Yes, of course, I know her; take you to see her, too, if you like," said the other.

"Thank you. I want to buy a little thing she has in there. I've marked the number."

"Which is it?" inquired his friend; but Oliver answered hurriedly:

"I know; it's all right; haven't time to go back with you now. When will you take me?"

"To-morrow, if you like—three o'clock to-morrow."

They arranged where they were to meet, and Oliver hurried after his mother and Kathleen, leaving the other man to wonder what it was that had made him so anxious to buy Mrs Jarvis's work.

The little model was not by any means a portrait of Betty—at least, most people would have allowed the resemblance to escape them; but the cleverness of the thing, the lines that were best about her, the pose and the expression of the figure, were peculiarly her own. Betty herself, in her ignorance, had been pleased to observe that "it was not in the least like." She thought gladly that "no one would ever know," and had been rather surprised that Mrs Jarvis had not produced a more speaking likeness.

She had gone out at an earlier hour than usual on the morning after her conversation with Drake. Somehow she felt afraid to let him see her go, so she left the house early, and did some errands for Mrs Trevoise, going on to the studio afterwards. She had begun almost to enjoy the hours of stillness in the great room; and that afternoon she was quite content to sit still and think. What was it? (she began to wonder)—that strange third thing—not the statue—not herself—but the vision that hung between, which the woman before her was trying to express. Then her

thoughts were interrupted by the tinkling of the electric bell at the studio door.

"There's someone coming who wishes to buy a model from me—that will be him now, I suppose," said Mrs Jarvis, laying down her tools. "Just sit as you are for a few minutes." She hurried out of the studio, and Betty heard her speaking to someone in the other room. "Come this way, please," she said, and came quickly walking across the studio towards her own sitting-room. She was followed by two men. The first one gave a casual glance at Betty as he passed. The second was Oliver Lacy. Betty did not move or look at him after the first instant when their eyes had met, only the blood rushed into her face, and drums seemed to beat in her ears. He followed the other man into the room, and the curtain fell again over the door.

Betty sprang up, tripping in her haste on the long muslin draperies, and hastily shuffled into the dressing-room. With trembling hands she hurried on her dress and cloak, pausing now and then to make sure that there was no one in the studio. Then she stood panting behind the curtain, wondering how she could get out unnoticed. Presently Mrs Jarvis and the two men returned; and Betty heard Oliver's voice: "A professional model?"

"Oh no; not quite. I pay her a little more, and she does not sit very well as yet; but she's such a pretty thing . . ." They passed on, talking;

and as soon as they had gone out at the other door Betty darted across the studio into the little sitting-room. She did not wait to put on her gloves; but opened the door leading into the garden and fled down to the gate—even as she reached it she heard the sound of voices at the hall door, and let the garden gate slam with a clatter behind her. It was a still, clear afternoon now, just darkening towards evening. Betty started off, walking as fast as she could down the lane, which had walls on each side—it was a long way to the corner where she could catch the 'bus. Again she heard the garden door slam; then came quick footsteps following her. A sort of terror possessed her overwrought nerves; she flew on as fast as she could, never looking behind her, scarcely knowing what it was that she so dreaded. As she came to an opening in the lane she turned down, never caring that it was not her right way, hoping only to find herself in a busier street; but it was only another longer and quieter road. She looked down the long vista, and darted on—at the far end there must surely be a street. The steps were still behind her, closer now, a man's long stride, that even her swift feet could not outspeed; then, the next instant he had swung round the corner, and sprung to her side. "Betty! Betty!" he called, catching her hands, and making her stand still.

Betty faced him desperately. "Let me go on, please," she panted. "I am in a hurry."

"I won't let you go. Tell me what this means. How did you come there?" Betty's cloak slipped off her shoulder; in her hurry she had not fastened it securely. He did not even stoop to lift it up lest she should escape him, but stood holding her by the arm, looking into her face. "Oh!" he said, "you are in trouble; I knew it. I have thought of nothing but your blue eyes since I saw you last. Betty—don't you know [that I love you better than anything in the world—I can't live without you—I have suffered all the torments——"

"I thought," began Betty, in a little cold, hard voice, that sounded strange to her own ears—Oliver paused—"I thought," said Betty again, "that you were not very much to depend on; but I did not think that you would insult me like this. Do you forget that you are going to marry another woman?"

"I forget everything—everything on earth but you," said Oliver. "I have never loved anyone before; I shall never love anyone again. O Betty! for God's sake, listen to me."

Betty leaned back her head, looking at him with her brows drawn together, and an expression of cruelty in her half-shut eyes that had never been there before. Now at least, for one minute, though her heart was breaking, she could fight with the only weapon that she had—her sharp tongue—and could wound her adversary—could at last avenge herself in some measure for all that she had suffered, though it cost her

unspeakable pain. This man was not like Mr Smythe; she could hurt him.

"It is useless for you to ask me to listen to you, Mr Lacy," she said, "because nothing that you could say would ever make any difference in what I think of you. I have been—I am now—in great trouble, but *you* are the last person that I should ever think of talking to about it. You see—it's just like this"—she drew a quick breath—"when you have got what you thought was a piece of gold, and then find that it's only a new farthing, what do you do?" She smiled as she looked at him. "That's the kind of mistake that I made about you. . . ." Oliver was silent. "I won't ever do so again," pursued Betty, cheerfully. "I am learning now—a little—what the world is like to a woman who has not been trained to support herself, and has no one to protect her. You—amongst other men—have taught me that."

"Betty, if you were my wife——"

"Wife!" said Betty—her colour rose and her eyes sparkled. "I wouldn't marry you *now*—to escape from anything. I'd rather starve—I'd rather sell——"

Oliver caught her arm almost roughly. He lifted her cloak and wrapped it about her, and hurried her up the lane. "Hush, child! you don't know what you're saying."

"I didn't once," Betty went on; "but I am learning much more now—as I told you." They reached the end of the lane, and Oliver signalled

to a cabman. "Don't, please ; I am going to walk," said the girl—and then she looked up, drawing in her breath as if in a moment's pity for him. She was able to hurt him more than she had hoped at last. "Don't, please ; I can't pay for it."

Oliver stood still for an instant with his head bent.

"Thank you ; isn't that about enough now," he said.

"Good-night," said Betty, turning away.

He watched until her figure was lost in the crowd along the street, then got into the cab, and called out a direction to the man. "And drive as fast as you like," he said.

CHAPTER XXXIX

MRS LACY had come up to town along with Oliver the week before. She had been lunching with the Rorkes, and was sitting in the drawing-room, discussing with Kathleen and her mother the patterns of white satin for the wedding dress, when Oliver came in.

"Why, Oliver, I did not know that you were coming," said Mrs Rorke. Mrs Lacy smiled. Kathleen, who had quicker perceptions, looked up at him in silence.

"I wish to speak to you for a moment, Kathleen," said Oliver, who was very pale.

"All right; go to the library. I'll come in an instant," said the girl, laying down the bits of white satin in a heap on the table.

She left the room, and the two older women sat chatting together for a quarter of an hour—half-an-hour—three-quarters—then Mrs Lacy rose. "If that boy of mine doesn't come away now, I must go alone."

"Ah! here he comes," said Mrs Rorke. But it was Kathleen who came into the room.

She had a bright spot of colour in each cheek; her eyelashes were wet with tears. "Mother and Mrs Lacy," she said, walking up and looking from one to the other, "Oliver wanted to tell

you, but I thought that I would rather do it myself; we are not going to be married after all—everything is over between us.”

“Kathleen!” cried her mother.

“Kathleen!” exclaimed Mrs Lacy.

“What do you mean?” said her mother.

“This is dreadful,” said Mrs Lacy, sitting down on the sofa to shudder behind her handkerchief.

Mrs Rorke was the first to regain her composure. “A little lover’s quarrel,” she remarked; “probably faults on both sides.”

Mrs Lacy caught at the idea. “Oliver is so sensitive,” she said; “his disposition is exactly like my own.”

“Kathleen is fond of her own way,” said Mrs Rorke, caressing Kathleen’s hand as it lay passive on her knee. The girl had not spoken.

Mrs Lacy uncovered her face, attempting a smile. “Young people nowadays have so many notions,” she began. “Oliver is full of them; but dear Kathleen, with your good sense, I am sure that you can easily be the first to make the peace.”

“Those little differences will always occur—even between married people,” said Mrs Rorke, liberally. “Mutual forbearance, Kathleen, even in married life——”

Each of them, now convinced of her own tact, turned eagerly to the task of peacemaking.

Kathleen heard their prattle in silence. She knelt on the rug, and laid a hand on the knee of each. Although tears still trembled on her eyelashes, she smiled as she looked from one

plump face to the other. "Dear ladies," she said, "believe me, this is not any little difference—such as occurs even in married life—that the exercise of a little mutual forbearance will slur over. I am sure that both of you will at once admit that marriage without love——"

"Oh!" cried both mothers.

"Is impossible," said Kathleen, and her smile broadened.

"But, Kathleen, Oliver always appeared devoted to you," said her mother.

"O Kathleen! you seemed to be so devoted to Oliver," said his mother.

"Appearances in those cases are sometimes deceitful," Kathleen went on. "We are sure that neither of you—" she winked away the tears as she spoke—"neither of you would ever urge us to marry without love on both sides?"

"Oh, certainly not, dearest—not for a moment but——" began her mother.

"No, my dear—never! still——" said Mrs Lacy.

"Exactly. Now we want you to ask no explanation of this except just that we have found that we do not care for each other as we supposed that we did; and it is much better—you will agree with us, I know—much better to have found this out in time—than afterwards—you know the consequences of *that*."

Both ladies looked profoundly solemn for a moment; then her mother heaved a sigh. "Kathleen, dearest, I scarcely like to hear you mention such a thing."

"Girls, now——" began Mrs Lacy.

"Have no feelings," said Kathleen, laughing. "Well, that's all I'm going to tell you. You can tell other people whatever you like." She stooped down to kiss her mother, and left the room quickly that they might not see her face. She came into the library, which was half-dark. Oliver stood motionless by the window.

"I've done it; I've told them both," said Kathleen, coming up to him, and lifting her smiling, tearful face to his. "Don't, Oliver—don't look like that—you only hurt me more. They don't know anything really about it—and never will. Are you going away now?"

"Yes; I am going away," said Oliver, in a dull voice.

"Wait—I want you to promise me something," said Kathleen, standing on tiptoe to look in his face. "If you're ever happy, Oliver—if she ever does—bring her to see me—I—I—" she stammered foolishly—"I will love her for your sake."

Oliver, without speaking, kissed her hand and went away.

CHAPTER XL

"*ONLY a new farthing,*" Oliver repeated to himself; "*only a new farthing.*" He scarcely looked up when Mrs Lacy came in. She had followed him home almost immediately. She entered the room with a great rustle and hurry, in subdued agitation.

"Oliver," she began, "I never could have believed it possible that you could behave in such a manner. Do you know what it means? Do you realise the talk?—the stories that will be told?" Oliver sat motionless, with his hands in his pockets, looking on the ground. He nodded slightly at each pause in her speech. "Kathleen has behaved beautifully. She refuses to utter a word of reproach. I am constrained to believe, Oliver, that you must have had some other reason than the one you gave for behaving in this extraordinary way."

"What reason am I supposed to have given?" he inquired, without raising his head.

"That you did not find that you had the same affection for one another that you had at first."

"I can't answer for Kathleen, mother," he said, in the same dull voice. "No doubt, she finds out how much she was mistaken in me"—(he

paused, to repeat to himself again "*Only a new farthing*") — "but I, for my part, have a much greater regard for her, and a much higher opinion of her than I had when we were first engaged, and," he said, still without looking at his mother, "I hope that you will say so to any of the people who want to know about the matter."

"Then what imaginable reason can you give for your behaviour?"

"I am not obliged, so far as I know, to give a reason of any kind to anyone except to Kathleen, and she knows what my reason was."

"Oliver," said Mrs Lacy, rustling nearer to him, and resting her plump white hand on the arm of his chair, "I must say this to you, that if you choose to behave in this exceedingly—" she paused for an adjective, found it, and plunged on — "perverse and ungentlemanly manner" — ("Perverse and ungentlemanly," Oliver repeated, gently, still adding to himself, "*A new farthing*") — "I cannot prevent it," Mrs Lacy went on; "but one thing I can do, and that is, if you have any idea of entering upon another marriage — which we spoke of before — which, in my opinion, would be senseless and unsuitable to the last degree, I must refuse to allow you the means to do so. You have your own allowance, of course; but I scarcely think that, with your tastes, you will think of marrying upon that."

She paused, and set her lips, and Oliver at last raised his head and looked at her — a long, loveless stare. He knew his mother, her nature and

her limitations, only too well, and knew that, in point of feeling, he might get quite as much sympathy from the wooden table on which she leant as from her.

"Very well, mother, I suppose you've a right to do as you please about money. I shall go away."

"Go away!" exclaimed Mrs Lacy.

"Certainly. Do you suppose that I'm going to live on in your house, like a tame cat, in that sort of position. I shall go away and try to live elsewhere."

"How?"

"By my wits, I suppose," said Oliver, still speaking with a perfect indifference that provoked Mrs Lacy more than any anger; "as many a better man has done."

Mrs Lacy never lost her temper. She opened her lips, and closed them again with a small smile.

"You know that I am always grieved to oppose you in anything, Oliver; but I consider it my duty to do all in my power to prevent such a marriage."

"Tell me, please, what your great objection to it would be. Is it Mrs Musgrave?"

"I think," said Mrs Lacy, "that we had better not discuss *that* matter. If I remember, Oliver, you yourself saw Mrs Musgrave. I never heard what you thought of her."

"I'll tell you," said Oliver, turning to her suddenly. "I found her worse than I could have

imagined ; the sort of thing that all your hints about being 'peculiar' and so on, had not prepared me for in the least. She was drunk when I saw her. And I was such a mean beast that I was afraid to face the thing. I thought I would forget all about the girl. And then I found that that was impossible—that she was never out of my thoughts, day or night—that if Kathleen had had every virtue under the sun, and she every disadvantage, I'd never hesitate between the two. Well, then, I still thought I would keep my word to Kathleen—'honour,' and so on—as if I had any left! But when I met Betty again I forgot everything—I never remembered there was another woman alive on earth—and I told her so. After that, of course, there was nothing for it but to tell Kathleen. *She* wouldn't have me after that, of course; but if you think that Betty——" he stopped for a moment, quivering at the mention of her name. Mrs Lacy regarded him with the calm eye of one who watches another possessed by a furious delusion that has turned his brain. She coughed slightly, touched the rings on her fingers, and waited for him to go on. "If you imagine," said Oliver, recovering himself, "that Miss Musgrave was ready to fall into my arms like a ripe plum, as you seem to do, you are mistaken. She told me what she thought of me—and I don't think even you would have liked to hear what it was."

"You are excited," said Mrs Lacy, rising to leave the room. "I think that we had better

not discuss this matter any further at present. You know what I think of your behaviour, and you have heard what I consider my duty, in my position, is towards you, and I think that you had better consider the matter quietly before coming to a final decision."

She rustled out of the room, enjoying her own attitude of dignified displeasure.

Late that night Oliver awoke from a short uneasy sleep and troubled dreams. He had dreamt that he was standing by the river at St Julliets—a river grown suddenly deep and angry—with Betty by his side. She slipped and fell in, and he saw her face of agony, and her little hands stretched out to him for help, as the rolling flood carried her away. Yet such a weight of cowardice oppressed him, such a cold terror of he knew not what, that he did not stir to save her: he had only time to realise the anguish of his self-contempt when he awoke.

He wakened, shivering, to thank God that it was only a dream. And then again came back the reality that had suggested it. In the slow dark hours he lay awake, seeing himself stripped of all those pinchbeck virtues with which he used to credit himself so easily. Lo! this was the superior young man who had had a good deal to be pleased with. He saw only such a poor, pitiful creature, that surely, he thought, were he to come amongst them now, those ancestors of his, that lay that night in their tombs in the frosty stillness of the little church at St Julliets

would kick him out of their company with contempt.

Oliver's fancy always mixed quickly with reality, and soon it seemed to him as if he were walking slowly up the little aisle in the mysterious shadows, groping his way towards the altar. There was a spot of light on the new brass that bore Mrs Wentworth's name. He read it; and then he heard, as he came on, how the figures on the stones whispered to each other; heard how at last the Crusader that lay by the east wall raised himself from his low, strait couch with a chink of mail, as he stirred again, to ask who this pitiful creature was that called himself by their name?

He flung himself down on the pavement, and prayed, he thought; and quite suddenly he saw two figures standing where the altar was—Betty and Mrs Wentworth. They wore white garments, as a bride does—or like the dead—and the face of the old woman was young again, and the face of the young was tender, and wise as age. But before Oliver could cry to them, or touch them where they stood, he awoke to the harsh light of morning, and his new conception of himself.

CHAPTER XLI

AFTER she parted from Oliver, Betty walked on as if in a dream. She had gone far out of her way, and by the time that she reached home it was now almost dark. She came into the cheerless house, that smelt of frying fat, for it was nearly the dinner hour, and Mrs Trevose's cookery always announced itself beforehand. As she went wearily upstairs, a door opened, and Mrs Trevose beckoned her to come into her own sitting-room. There she was standing talking to Drake. She drew Betty into the room, closing the door with her habitual caution. The girl heard Drake murmur, "Not just now; she's tired, you see," as she advanced into the light, that showed her pale face.

Betty turned to Mrs Trevose. "There is something the matter. Please tell me now. I would rather know at once."

"T'it's merely t' *little* unpleasantness," faltered Mrs Trevose, who looked agitated. Drake stood by the fireplace in silence.

Betty sat down, and let her hands fall on her lap, turning a stony face to the woman. "Oh, tell me—whatever it is—I hope you will not keep me waiting this way—it's something about my mother?"

"T'it's just t'is, dear," said Mrs Trevose, moving

her chair close to Betty's, and, laying her little greasy hand on her knee, looking up at Drake with a glance, as if to ask whether she should proceed. His face was very grim; but he nodded slightly, and she went on. "T'ere's been t' *slight disturbance* between Mrs Levison and Mrs Musgrave"—Betty sat up looking at her. "T'it was in t' early afternoon, when you had gone out. T'ere was t' little dispute between t'em, and t'en Mrs Musgrave got excited—t'ose sensitive natures, darlin', are so *easily* upset—she happened to have thrown——"

"Yes; did she hurt her?" said Betty, quietly. Drake moved, as if to interrupt Mrs Trevoise; but she went on.

"Merely t' *slightest* mark, dear,—many's t' day that Trevoise——" she slurred his memory gracefully. "But Mrs Levison has t' hasty temper, and she took it in bad part. T'ere was t' regular quarrel, and t' whole house listening; and Mr Drake, he had to interfere, for Mrs Levison was callin' for t' police"—she stopped again. Betty felt stupid; she said nothing. "T' fact is, darlin'," continued the woman, "t'at t'is house is *scarcely* t' place for a person of Mrs Musgrave's temp'rament—change and country air——"

"Oh! I understand—you mean that we must go away. Yes—of course—we must go at once."

She half rose, and Mrs Trevoise, with hasty emphasis, began to explain her meaning. "T'it's only t' plan for t' future, dear—*no hurry*—you

must take time to consider it, and not be in *any way* hurried."

"Your house will be emptied—we must go at once," Betty repeated. She still sat with her hands on her lap, and the same fixed look on her face. Drake had not spoken.

"I know of t' *quiet* spot in t' *remote* country t'at would be a complete change," continued Mrs Trevoise. "'Tis a farm t'at's kept by Trevoise's sister, t'at's married upon a Cornishman."

"I have no money," said Betty.

"T'it would be t' *very* small board t'at was asked t'ere, darlin'—I could arrange t'at."

"It is a long journey. I have no money," the girl repeated.

"I thought you were making some money—from Mrs Jarvis?" said Drake, breaking his silence at last.

Betty put her hand into her pocket and took out some silver. "I carry it with me to keep it safe," she said. "That is all that I have made this week. It's not enough to pay what I owe you, Mrs Trevoise." She held the silver in the palm of her hand, and looked from one to the other, as if she scarcely understood what they were talking about. "I might, perhaps—if Mrs Jarvis gave me an introduction to some man she knew—she knows a great many artists," she began.

"You might—perhaps," said Drake, dryly.

"But that takes such a long time," said Betty. Then quite simply she raised her white face to

Drake, and said, "You—you will give it to me, I think."

A sudden smile broke across the man's grim face—his eyes glowed and darkened as he bent over her chair. Mrs Trevose did not wait to hear what he said to Betty. With an adroit exclamation of "T'ere's somethin' burnin' downstairs—t' fat's in t' fire, I declare!—close on t' dinner hour, too!" she slipped from the room, leaving them together.

"You will take it from me?" said Drake.

Betty looked at him with a kind of wonder. She had no heart left to pity anyone else. "Yes; I will take it. I can give you nothing in return," she added.

"I want—nothing," said Drake, softly.

Betty went upstairs to find her mother, and there had to listen for half-an-hour to Mrs Musgrave's torrent of explanation—of abuse of Mrs Levison—Mrs Trevose—everyone in the house. "We are going away, mother. You will not be tried by them any longer; we shall go away at once. I have heard of a place in the country where we can board very cheaply."

"Buried alive!" ejaculated her mother. "It was simply to humour you, Betty, that I ever stayed here—to humour your taste for excitement and amusement in town. Now I have lived to be insulted——" She began the whole story over again. Betty had turned away without listening. "I took up the paltry ornament," continued her mother; "it was lying on the table.

I merely glanced at it, when she demanded what I had done with it—as if I had been a thief. ‘Do you think I am a thief,’ I asked—and the creature laughed——”

“Oh! forget it now. It doesn’t matter what she said,” said Betty.

“No; it doesn’t matter to you what is said or done to me,” she exclaimed, passionately; then added, in a quieter tone, “I had a little daughter that loved me once.”

Betty winced, as she moved about the room with bent head, folding up her mother’s disordered things. She could not go down to dinner when the bell rang; but Mrs Trevoise came slipping upstairs to whisper to her that a meal was ready for them in her sitting-room. The good woman was quite calm again. When the injured Mrs Levison had appeared at the dinner-table, casting a wrathful glance at Mrs Musgrave’s empty chair, she turned to Drake with a cheerful remark.

“T’it’s a little better t’is evenin’, Mr Drake. *Tere’s t’ lightenin’ on t’ horizon, I’m thinkin’.*”

“Storm passing over, you think?” said Drake, who looked well pleased.

CHAPTER XLII

ONCE more Oliver stood on Mrs Trevoſe's dooſteſt, and aſked to ſee Miſſ Muſgrave. This time the powdered maid-ſervant replied, with a ſniff, that Miſſ Muſgrave "didn't live 'ere no longer."

"Where haſ ſhe gone?"

"Couln't ſay," replied the maid.

"Can I ſee your miſtreſſ?" ſaid Oliver.

She trailed off down the paſſage, leaving him ſtanding at the door. Returning, ſhe told him that Mrs Trevoſe would ſpeak with him immediately; then ſhe ſhowed him into the ſitting-room. Oliver ſtood gazing at the door. This time he noticed none of hiſ ſurroundings—had only a vague impreſſion of the fragments of a meal left upon the table. When Mrs Trevoſe came in he advanced a ſtep, trembling, to meet her. She took in hiſ whole figure at a glance. No hope of a boarder here.

"I came to ſee Miſſ Muſgrave," he began.

"*Preciſely!* Take a chair, ſir." She ſeated herſelf with one of her adroit movements, ſo that Oliver faced the light, whiſt her own face waſ in ſhadow. "Miſſ Muſgrave haſ left my houſe," ſhe went on, taking in Oliver's whole appearance aſ ſhe ſpoke, and drawing her own

conclusions. "She has taken her mother for t' *complete* change of air and scene."

"Ah! To the country, then?"

"'Tis a *complete* change," Mrs Trevose continued—she was a past-mistress in the art of evasion. "London is t'at t'ronged and close to those accustomed to a *quiet* life."

"What part of the country have they gone to?"

"T'ere are lovely spots to be found all over England—and Scotland too—most suitable for t' invalids, though t' air is more bracing in Scotland."

"Then I understand that Miss Musgrave has returned to Scotland?"

"Dear, dear! T' Scotch are always anxious to return to t'eir own country, wherever they are. Just like t' Welsh."

"Are they in Wales, then?"

"T'it's a *beautiful* little country, Wales," said Mrs Trevose, with a smile. "Most *romantic*, I'm told."

"Where are they staying in Wales?"

"T'it's *wonderful* how soon one gets accustomed to t' complete change of air and scene," Mrs Trevose remarked cheerfully. Oliver grew incensed.

"My good woman, do you know that I am asking you a plain question; will you give me a plain answer, please?"

Mrs Trevose regarded him with a twinkling eye. "Good woman me none of your 'good womans,' dear! You'll get no plain answer out

of me, till you tell me what it is you're wantin' with Miss Musgrave."

"I want to *see* her, I tell you. I'm a friend of hers."

"They've *few* friends t'at's in misfortune, Mr Lacy."

"She is in trouble, then?" he asked.

"*Apparently* not, or friends wouldn't be flockin' to see her," said Mrs Trevoise, composedly. "You're t' third gentleman within two days t'at has asked me for Miss Musgrave's address."

"The deuce I am!" muttered Oliver. He was not accustomed to being browbeat or cross-questioned. His large manner had as much effect upon Mrs Trevoise, as wind upon a rock. As he tried to pin her to a definite answer, he was involuntarily reminded of how once at a country fair he had watched a man trying to catch a greased pig. Just so Mrs Trevoise slipped from him whenever he thought that he was getting near the point.

"T'it'll be t' *young* lady, not Mrs Musgrave, t'at you're anxious to see?"

"Yes, yes, of course. Are they not together?"

"T' devotion of an affectionate daughter is t' charming sight."

"Mrs Trevoise," said Oliver, now losing all patience. "I must ask you at once to tell me whether you intend to give me that address or not? If not, I'm going away."

"If 'tis *merely* as a friend," said Mrs Trevoise, looking with keen interest in his face as she spoke,

"t'it's scarcely worth while, for t'it's such a distance, t'at an *ordinary* visit is out of t' question."

"Allow me to judge of that for myself."

"Send a note," said Mrs Trevoise, smiling, "and I'll forward it to her—all letters are carefully forwarded from my house."

Oliver turned to her with a groan of impatience. "Well—if you won't—I may as well tell you that I'm going to ask Miss Musgrave to marry me."

"Dear! dear! dear!" ejaculated Mrs Trevoise, moving quickly to a seat nearer to him, and assuming a confidential whisper in a moment. She folded her little greasy hands across her waist, and leaned her ample bosom towards him with an air of cheerful, insinuating mystery that would have won any heart. "T' *beautiful* creature, Mr Lacy—and good as good—well I know t'at. You'll perhaps be acquainted with Mrs Musgrave also?"

"Slightly."

"T' peculiarities of her disposition are *most tryin'* for t' young lady."

"Yes, I know; it's most unfortunate."

Mrs Trevoise had now made up her mind about Oliver. "T'it's terrible," she said; "t'it's just t' daughter of t' 'orse leech over again—she'd drink t' bed from under her, and t' weddin' ring from off her finger, and t'ere's none on earth can stop her now, Mr Lacy—and t' poor darlin' she'll break her heart, and work herself to skin and bone to pay for it. A good husband, Mr

Lacy, said I to her the day she left me, is t' only thing for her—who'll take her away from Mrs Musgrave."

"It's very sad. Will you tell me now where she lives?"

"T'it's a little farm—kept by Trevoise's sister," said the woman, "in t' very remote locality and t' inaccessible neighbourhood; but she'll get it even t'ere, I'm thinkin'—if she's to sell her shift to do so. T' sooner Miss Musgrave leaves her the better. Providence is kind to t' shorn lamb (certainly)—but t'ere's no Providence like a husband for a good-lookin' young woman, Mr Lacy."

"And the address?" said Oliver, who rose to go.

Mrs Trevoise pressed the hand that he held out to her. "You'll send t' note to me, dear! I'll forward it by t' first post, and t'en she'll know you're comin'. And don't take 'no' for an answer t' first time," she added, genially. Oliver smiled. Mrs Trevoise squeezed his hand again, and ran to the window when he had left the room, watching him go down the steps.

"T'at makes t'ree," she commented to herself. "Young Levison—he's got t' money, but he's t'at black and fat; and Mr Smythe—he's not t' sort for t' likes of her I'm thinkin'—though those t'at's so situated can't be choosers. But," she added, watching Oliver's retreating figure, "I'd give him no address to spoil Drake's chance with arrivin' too soon. I'm doubtin' t'at

lad's been back'ard in comin' forrard. He'l maybe find his mistake." She let the grimy lace curtain fall again over the window as she turned away, adding to herself, "Love should be as hot as muffins to my mind, or it's not worth t' havin'."

It was not until he reached home that Oliver realised that, despite the warmth of her last words, Mrs Trevoise had not given him the address after all.

He wrote a note to Betty, asking her to let him come to see her once again—a short imploring note. This he sent to Mrs Trevoise. A week afterwards it was returned to him, re-addressed in Betty's handwriting, without a single line along with it.

CHAPTER XLIII

THE farmhouse to which Betty and her mother had gone was very lonely. Just as before she had had an impulse to hide in the crowds of London, so now the girl felt that no solitude could be too great. She wanted to get away from everything—even Mrs Trevoise's kindness could not keep her—the house, the people, the whole atmosphere had become unendurable. If she could get away from everyone that she had ever seen or heard of, and let her very name be forgotten; she would be content. At first Mrs Musgrave had appeared quite pleased. She was longing for country air, she said. Betty bade Mrs Jarvis good-bye with regret. She had left the studio so hurriedly the day that she had seen Oliver, and had written a note afterwards, making some excuse for not appearing again on the usual day. The kind woman made her promise to write to her, and ended by asking her if she was in want of money. Betty thanked her. "A friend has lent me what I needed," she said; but Mrs Jarvis looked at her so closely as she spoke that it made her blush, and then the woman laughed.

The farewells to Mrs Trevoise were more trying. She encouraged Betty by pointing out the in-

numerable advantages of life in an old broken-down farmhouse in a lonely neighbourhood. The way in which she uttered the words, "*complete* solitude, and *all* t' pleasures of rural life, dear," brought refreshing pictures to the mind's eye.

They started on their long journey early in the morning. Betty was thankful to get out of London; but Mrs Musgrave would pay no attention to anything. She gazed out at the carriage window with a vacant stare—fields and farms, rolling stretches of country, or glimpses of woods and villages, that made Betty cry out with pleasure, elicited no remark from her. The journey was a very long one, and night had fallen before they reached the station, after which they had many miles to drive. The keen country air, the profound stillness and velvet blackness of the night made Betty feel as if it were another world from London altogether. They jolted up hill and down, for mile after mile. Mrs Musgrave did not speak, except to complain of cold or weariness, and looking from the carriage window Betty saw nothing but the vague, dark outline of the treeless land, and a patch of starless sky. At last they jolted into a paved courtyard, where light was streaming from an open door, at which stood a lean, toothless woman with a lantern in her hand. Betty helped her mother to alight, and followed her into the house. They were shown into a low-roofed old room, where a fire of green logs was

burning indifferently in a cavernous grate. The light was dim, and the air filled with a mouldy smell. "We have come to a living grave," said Mrs Musgrave, sinking down into a chair, and casting a hopeless glance about her.

Betty's heart sank. "Perhaps things will look better by daylight, mother," she said, cheerfully. Mrs Musgrave only groaned and shook her head.

Betty lay awake for a long time that night. Instead of the rattle of London, she heard only the faint, deep murmur of the distant sea. The faces of all the people that she had left behind seemed to pass endlessly before her eyes. She thought of the last night that she had spent in the quiet country—at St Julliets. She thought of Mrs Wentworth as she had seen her last, lying white and smiling, never again to waken to another morning—and envied her long sleep. At last she slept, and when the early light that pierced the heart-shaped hole in the shutters struck on her eyes, awoke, surprised to find that it was day. Then again she listened to the stillness all around; it was marvellous after London, making her feel as if she were holding her breath before the crash of some expected sound—but the sound never came.

The House of Redmyre had been, in ages gone by, a manor belonging to one of the great families of the West—long since become extinct. Fire, desolation, and ruin had worked destruction; till all that now remained of the original building was the great old dining-room,

and two or three smaller apartments that opened off it, which, by the rich work on doors and ceilings, still showed traces of former grandeur. The plain farmhouse had been built on to these, and all around were huddled offices and barns. The courtyard, into which the knightly owners used to clatter with their retinue, showed only a sea of mud, where the big black pigs rooted after garbage, and two or three sulky bullocks stood shouldering each other like a group of awkward schoolboys, amongst the pashed straw.

In front of the house nearly every mark of the ancient gardens had disappeared. A clump of cypresses, long unpruned, and grown in that mild climate to an uncommon height, raised their black spires amongst the few crippled, hoary apple-trees and the dreary tangle of underbrush.

For the first day or two Betty supposed that the woman who kept the farm was a widow. Mrs Trevoise had not spoken of her husband, and seeing no man about the place, Betty thought that she lived alone, until one morning she made her way into the farm kitchen. There she found a big old man, almost completely paralysed, propped in an arm-chair beside the fire. "Hit's my 'usband, miss," the woman explained (she spoke with a lisp as well as a Western accent); "'e was a sthrong man once, but 'e's near the clod-'ole now—'e's fit for nothin' but to dhrive the chickens away," and Betty noticed that in one flaccid hand he held a little branch (it had two

green leaves a-top of it that day, for it was nearly spring in the world again); with it he feebly switched at the chickens when they ran in through the open door, and came too near the hearth.

Betty went close up, and bent down over his chair, speaking in her clear, high voice. He sat with his unshaven double chin sunk upon his neck-cloth, and dim eyes staring in front of him; but as she spoke he raised his heavy head and blinked at her, such a vision as she was.

"The young lady—bless 'er fayre face!" he mumbled. She came often in to see him after that as he sat half-alive by the chimney corner. He would turn his great dull face when she came in, and signal with a tremble of his little switch that he wanted her to sit down and talk to him. Betty would describe to him in detail everything that she saw going on out-of-doors—how swallows had begun to build in the eaves of the barn, how a new drain was being laid in the field, or such and such tiny change had taken place about the offices—it seemed all that he wanted; and the girl was thankful to have someone else to think of. The sight of her mother's apathy roused her to exert herself as much as she could. Mrs Musgrave seemed to care for nothing. Just at first Betty missed Mrs Trevose's kindly presence very keenly; but she loved the country and country life, and soon began to know the woman of the farm, and the one servant, who was dairy-maid and everything else combined, and to take

the most lively interest in hens and butter. She had much more to do here than in London, and she sewed and darned and dusted, doing all in her power to keep things neat. But no work, however rough, seemed able to take her completely out of herself. Willingly would she have gone down on her knees to scrub floors, have milked cows, or washed pans, if that could have brought her forgetfulness of her trouble. But mere handiwork can seldom lull thought in an educated mind, and Betty found herself miserable enough through it all. Her mother at first was in a hopeless condition; nothing would rouse her to any interest in anything. She sat shivering in the little sitting-room, where draughts pierced through every cranny, and would not even look out of the window—only rocking herself back and forwards, would repeat, again and again, “I wish I were dead—dead and in my grave—then, at least, I would have peace. Go away and leave me, Betty—why should you stay here?”

Betty used to go out to the yard in the morning to watch the hens being fed. She had simple tastes; and sometimes when she stood, on a bright morning, with the fowls clucking about her, and hearing the stir of life—such as it was—about the farm, she would think how happy those people might be.

One day when she went into the farm kitchen she found her mother there. She was bending over old Mr Cuthbert's chair, talking to him in a low voice. Betty just glanced at them, and

turned away. "She is sorry for him," she thought gladly, "poor old man, sitting there so helpless. She must be better, even to have noticed him. Oh! if she would begin to interest herself in any one." Mrs Musgrave only said absently, "Yes, yes, poor helpless thing," when Betty remarked about the old man afterwards.

The next morning the girl went in to see him. "Does no one ever go into the old rooms?" she asked.

He shook his head, and raised the little switch till it trembled upwards. "The spirits . . . walk — there," he answered; and Betty thought of the first night when she had lain awake in the dark, and heard far off the deep roaring of the sea, and in the old part of the house queer sounds of cracking boards, and scampering mice. "Dull 'ere for a lady like you," said the old man slowly.

Betty shook her head. "My mother came to see you yesterday?" she said.

He nodded. "She'll not be wantin' it for long," he mumbled. "Been at me—in the kitchen—to get it from t'a carryer"—here the switch trembled in the direction of the parlour. He looked at Betty, bursting into a little chuckle, adding, "Wife, she's got nought in the house but cider,"—as if he expected Betty to join in the laugh.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE slow weeks wore on, and Betty began to miss Mrs Trevose, with her cheerful counsel, more and more. Even in fine weather the old house was damp and unwholesome; when it rained—as in that climate it often did for days together—every room smelt like a grave; then the small wood fires in the cavernous grates seemed to give out no heat, and the great cypress trees were beaded with moisture on every one of their black narrow leaves.

Betty had been out of health to begin with. She now began to suffer from the damp; and the loneliness of her life became oppressive. They had no near neighbours. Shortly after their arrival the rector's wife had come to call. She was a kind woman, with a timid, delicate face, and Betty would have welcomed her gladly had she felt at ease for a moment. Their first words were scarcely uttered before Mrs Musgrave came into the room. This time she made an impressive entrance, wearing her best gown, and carrying a Bible in her hand. "It is my only support," she remarked, tapping the book as she sat down beside their visitor. "God's Word never fails the afflicted—however deep their trouble may be," she added. The lady, rather over-

whelmed, glanced at Betty's pale face and contracted brows, and murmured some reply.

"To see me *now*," Mrs Musgrave continued, "you wouldn't suppose that I had once been very differently situated. Were it not for my Heavenly Father's unfailing consolations I should never have been able to endure the persecution—the insults——"

"Mother, oh mother!" said the girl imploringly; but the storm had burst, and Mrs Musgrave turned upon her with fierce abuse, under cover of which their visitor took a hurried leave. She never came again, though she used to speak to Betty when she saw her in church.

Mrs Musgrave hated the country and the lonely neighbourhood. She would weep and sulk for days together, and then, as if inspired by some inward fever, set out on long rambles by herself, refusing Betty's company. She would return pale and exhausted, only to shake her head in answer to all the girl's efforts to tempt her to eat. Betty saw that something was weighing upon her mind, but she hoped that it was only the dulness of the country. Sometimes she paced up and down the empty old dining-hall with a quick, shuffling step. Betty, sitting by the wood fire in the other room, listened with a sore heart as the footsteps came along the cracking boards by the door, paused, and then went on again, echoing up the whole length of the room.

One wet afternoon, when her mother had been particularly restless, Betty had listened to this

until she could stand it no longer. At last she put down her work and went into the hall. As she entered, her mother had paused for a moment by one of the windows. There she stood gazing out at the dreary prospect: the cypresses hoary with rain, and the gnarled, mouldy apple trees leaning this way and that. She held a crumpled letter in her hand, and Betty saw that her face was drawn into fierce lines of passion and despair. The girl remembered, as she looked at her, how beautiful she had seemed that day long ago, when a little child watched her standing on the deck of the outward bound steamer. She remembered her rosy face, her white veil pushed half up, and the way that she had kissed her hands to the child as the ship moved off. How the little heart had nearly broken with love and sorrow then—and now! She came up to her so quietly that Mrs Musgrave did not stir until a board creaked behind her. She turned then with a convulsive movement, that startled Betty, clutching wildly at the girl's arm, crumpling the letter hard in the palm of her hand. A faint smell of brandy hung about her; her hands were dry, and burning hot; under her eyes circles of a deep bistre, and there was a little foam at the corner of her mouth. She dragged Betty forwards into the light.

"It's a lie," she said. "I haven't got it—I never had——"

"Had what, mother? What are you talking about? Have you had a letter? I did not know the post was in."

Mrs Musgrave rubbed her hand across her eyes, letting go Betty's arm. In an instant her tone had changed, and she said in a coaxing way :

"You're quite buried alive here, darling—it's wrong. You would be the better of seeing some more people."

"Oh no, mother; I don't want to see anyone."

"Ah, well; *but some people want to see you*"—she paused, looking at Betty. "He is coming to-morrow."

"He? Who do you mean?"

"Mr Smythe," said Mrs Musgrave.

"Mother," said the girl, in a sharp voice, turning full upon her. "How can you! I will not see him. I will go out, or stay in another room if he comes. I will never speak to him again. I wonder that he dares to come here!"

"Why, Betty?"

"He knows," said Betty. "He will not need it explained. You may do what you like, mother; but I tell you that you shall not bring me into the same room along with that man."

"But, Betty——"

"You need not say any more. I will never see him or speak to him again. I wonder how he dares——" Her hands were clenched, and she spoke in a tone that her mother had never heard her use before.

"How like your father you are!" said the woman, involuntarily, as she looked at her; then lowering her voice to a whisper, she tightened her hold on Betty's arm. "You must, you must!"

she whispered. "Do you remember how he lost his diamond ring when we were with Mrs Trevose?"

Betty turned a scared face, with set lips, and eyes wide with fear.

"Mother, mother, not *you*!"

"Oh no, no, no," said Mrs Musgrave, panting, clutching the girl's arm like a vice. "I did not—I did not, Betty—but circumstances—people tell lies—foul lies—there is no saying what people will allege——"

As Betty stood still and did not speak, she sank down on to the old settle in the window, and crouched there, covering her face with her hands, shivering, sobbing. "O Betty, be merciful! be merciful! You don't know what it is! I meant to put it back—I did not know what I was doing." She raised her haggard face and called out aloud, so that the empty room rang, "I'm lost—lost—lost!"

"Hush, mother. Oh, dear—don't let people hear you!" The girl dropped on her knees by her side, and put her arms round her.

"Betty, Betty, you'll save me! He would do anything for you. He admires you so much—he told me."

"Be quiet," said Betty. "I can't let you say that. He knows what I think of him; but I will see him, I promise you, mother, if you try to be calm; you are making yourself ill—give me the letter."

She took the letter from her mother, and gently

raised her from the seat, and led her into her own room. Then she sat and stroked her hot, trembling hands, and sat by her until she saw her a good deal quieted down.

The window was open, and as they sat in silence together, Betty heard the sound of church bells. It was a Saint's day, and an evening service would be held, but she had not thought of going to church. She only went on Sundays because she had always been accustomed to do so, and she clung to everything that made a tie with her childhood. As she sat now and heard the old broken-throated bells ringing chimes, the plaguent simple tune, recurring again and again, seemed to call the girl like a mourning voice at her very heart. She rose to follow, as if someone had called her name.

CHAPTER XLV

AS long as the chimes went on, Betty forgot her languor; but when they ceased, and the bell began to ring for service, the road, which was uphill all the way, seemed very long. She felt as if she could scarcely take the last few steps, and was thankful when she reached the church to creep into one of the pews near the door and close her eyes.

She made no attempt to follow the service. Her own thoughts were speaking too loud.

"*Lord have mercy upon us,*" chanted the shrill voices. Betty raised her head at last, and looked along the aisle of the little church. It was empty—only two or three people; the dim light swam upon the low arches and the squat granite pillars, touching the half-defaced fresco on the other wall. She looked into her own life and saw only a deepening darkness. Here she was, with this dark hour before her, her heart breaking in her breast, with no helper in the world—to what depths of unknown misery might she not be dragged down. Ah! in that dim air was there nothing that she could lay hold of?

"*Christ have mercy upon us.*"

She buried her face in her hands.

"*Because there is none other that fighteth for us, save only Thou——*"

Betty heard no more of the service after that. When it came to an end, she rose slowly, leaning hard on the corner of the pew for a moment. One by one the people passed out through the open door. Betty waited until they were all gone; then went out alone, slowly, silently, over the velvet-soft old pavement. At the door she turned once again and looked into the little empty sanctuary. Empty!

She went out, and walked towards the gate; then turned there also, and looked behind her. Away down below, far down, stood the huge black headland at the mouth of the bay. A faint light shone on the sea, that was filling the mists with a murmur like distant drums of war. There was no sail on the horizon; the sky was covered by challenging, changing wreaths of cloud.

As Betty stood and looked, the whole long anguish of her loneliness rose up before her—as the desert he is half-way across lies stretched before a man who dies of thirst.

She could not go home yet, she felt. Why had she come to church at all; it was all empty, and what comfort was there? She turned away from the gate and took the road that led down to the sea. She could go and sit by the shore for a while, and then walk back across the fields; it was not late, and the evenings were long light still. Up and down by the hollows of the green fields she went, walking quickly at first, and then, as she came near the shore, slackening her pace. She scarcely knew what she

wanted, or what had brought her there, only felt driven on by some instinct. At last she heard the long murmuring sound of the waves, and could feel the gentle wind blowing the spray against her face.

When the tide went out it left in the bay acres of yellow sand—level, and coloured like a pavement of gold—a place one might think where blessed spirits would come and wander, there to feel how free they were from the shackles of life. But when the tide came in to shore it seemed from the cliff as if an Host encompassed it—with so tremendous a force the unnumbered waves came on, bearing with them, to an imaginative mind, the noise of the mysteries of the world.

Betty crawled to the edge, and flinging herself down on the grass, she watched idly for a while the wonderful white battle that was going on below. The sun shone out again for the last time in a dim golden haze, the rain clouds had drifted away, and the warm wind laden with moisture blew up from the west. She shut her eyes to listen to the rolling, the deep, low rolling of the mile-long breakers, as they drove in to shore—then, under her very feet, as it were, the muffled sound of their withdrawing flood—and again and again its return. There was no cessation—no pause in the sweet overpowering sound; it would not allow her to think. She could only follow it, as if each wave drew her heart away to some distant rest, and then swept it back again and rocked it like a cradled child.

"Because there is none other that fighteth for us, save only Thee," she repeated to herself, vaguely echoing the words that had lingered in her mind. Then once more, over and over, until suddenly she sat up, pushing away the hair that the wind had blown across her eyes, repeated the words aloud, "There is none other that fighteth for us." Some words of Mrs Wentworth's came back to her, then. "*It is only when the very dearest, the very nearest of human aid is useless ; that, as a young bird is pushed over the nest, so the soul is thrown out as it seems on despair—to find that it has wings, and can fly away and be at rest.*" She remembered reading the letter that told her of Oliver's faithlessness ; and how at the time she read, the words had no meaning to her. Surely her soul had been thrown out to despair—yet might she find strength? She drew her cloak more closely about her, and rose to her feet, looking out at the sea, until the golden distance was lost in clouds. She felt as if she had appealed despairingly for help, and in the darkness had been clasped by a strong hand. Her simple nature did not question how—she only knew that she had received the help she sought. The warm wind blew inland as she turned to walk home ; it carried with it the mysterious noise of the sea. "It bloweth as it listeth . . . so is every one that is born of God."

When she came back to the house, Mrs Cuthbert was standing in the farmyard. She moved to

meet the girl, saying under her breath, "There's a gentleman waiting, miss. *She* (Mrs Musgrave) went out a little before he came, and he's waiting now."

Betty grew pale. "If Mrs Musgrave comes in, tell her that I am speaking to the gentleman alone," she said. "Where is he?"

"He's in t' ould room, miss. He went to see the ceiling," she said.

Betty stopped her as she began to unroll her apron to conduct her into the house. "I'll go alone," she said.

Mrs Cuthbert looked after her with a curious stare, then sludged off to the cow-house, scattering the screaming fowls as she went. It was a fine evening now, and the setting sun struck brilliantly against the old windows, sending shafts of dusty light into the long room, as Betty came in.

CHAPTER XLVI

BETTY walked forwards without hesitation.

She held her head high, and colour rose in her cheeks, as she saw Mr Smythe standing at the end of the room. He held out his hand to her, but she ignored the action, and paused before him without any sign of recognition. He flushed, and coughed, and fidgeted uneasily, and then began, "I have come here to-day upon very unpleasant business, Miss Musgrave."

"May I ask you to tell me at once what it is?" said Betty.

"I think—ah—I fear that you probably have some idea already of what I mean," he answered, looking at her with his hard blue eyes.

"I have many disagreeable associations with you," said Betty.

"Ah!—yes—perhaps we misunderstood each other the last time we met. I remember a slight unpleasantness." Betty remained silent. "In fact, I think that we both lost our tempers," he tried to laugh. "I have come to-day to speak personally about a very sad affair which nothing but—ahem"—he coughed—"a sense of duty would have induced me to speak about. You may remember, Miss Musgrave, that at the time we last met I left Mrs Trevoise's house at rather

short notice." Betty nodded in reply. "It was only immediately before I went that I discovered that a ring of mine—of some value—was missing." He paused to see the effect of this; but Betty stood before him very upright and unmoved. "I made inquiries about it immediately; sought for it everywhere; told Mrs Trevoise, and she searched the room most thoroughly. Some time afterwards (I had been obliged to employ the services of a detective) I found out—beyond question, I'm afraid—that the ring had been taken from my table one morning by someone in the house."

"You mean—my—mother," said Betty, slowly.

Mr Smythe rubbed his hands together nervously. "I'm afraid—my dear young lady—that that is the case."

"What do you mean to do?"

"I—ah—well—I mean—I must—we all must, in such cases, obey the law. Of course, the matter will be fully investigated; but I fear it is already proven."

"Why have you come here?"

"I came, as I said, to see you personally, before it was necessary to take a more decided step in the matter."

"I wish that you had sent a policeman," said Betty.

The tone of her voice made the man's eyes glint with anger, but he controlled himself with an effort. "I *have* got—an officer of the law—with me, as it happens, Miss Musgrave; but, out of

consideration to you, I left him—he is waiting in the dogcart at some little distance from the house.”

“I would much rather have seen *him*,” said Betty again.

The man ground his teeth together under his white beard. “One word more, Miss Musgrave—just a word, before I am reduced to the extreme measure of summoning him. Do you realise what this will mean?”

“*I think I do*,” said Betty.

“Do you know that it means that your mother will go to prison like—to put it plainly—a common thief?”

“I know that.”

“But,” he went on, drawing suddenly near to her, and lowering his voice, glancing behind him as if to make sure that they were not overheard, “I am willing, for your sake, to slur over the whole matter, to take no further steps about it, if you will agree to let bygones be bygones.”

As he spoke, Betty recoiled, moving away from him as if he were something so repugnant that she could not endure his proximity for another moment.

She stepped into the broad bar of dusty sunlight that fell through the window across the room. It struck on her hair, on her brave face, turned slightly aside, as if she could not even bear to look at him as he spoke.

“Miss Musgrave,” Mr Smythe continued, “believe me that I am anxious to spare you as much

as I can, if you will overlook some words of mine uttered in a moment of haste, not, I think without provocation."

Betty just turned her eyes on him for a moment and smiled faintly, a little contemptuous smile. Again he flushed with anger, but went on: "Your mother may be saved from the disgrace which always attaches to such an experience. You, yourself, if you will marry me——" he paused; but Betty did not glance at him again—"will find yourself surely in better circumstances than I find you in at present."

"If that is all that you have to say, perhaps you will go away now?" said Betty.

"You——" began the man, then again tried to speak with calmness. "I think, Miss Musgrave, that it will be well for you to consider this before you speak. To save your mother——"

Betty turned suddenly, and looked at him. "Bah!" she said, "that's what people do in story-books. No disgrace in the world"—she spoke very deliberately and quietly—"could ever approach to the degradation that I feel it to be obliged even to speak to you."

"Very well, in that case, there is only one thing left for me to do——" He moved to the door.

"My mother has not come in yet, I think," said Betty. "You must wait for a few minutes. I will go and ask Mrs Cuthbert where she went."

She walked out into the farmyard, Mr Smythe following her. The woman had just finished

milking the cows, and was coming back to the house with the milk pails. When Betty inquired about her mother, she shook her head.

"Couldn't say, miss, where she went. She never told me. She on with 'er bonnet and out, whiles you was away, and I don't know where she went."

She stopped beside them, wiping her hands on her coarse apron, and glancing suspiciously at Mr Smythe.

"We must find her," he said.

"She's out at times, for a long while," said the woman, "and havin' no notion of where she's gone." She looked again at Betty.

"Ah! in that case, we'll just wait about here," said Mr Smythe. He walked off to speak to the man who stood beside the dogcart on the road by the front entrance to the house.

"We'll ask my 'usband, miss. Maybe he's seen her pass," said Mrs Cuthbert; and, lifting her milk pails, she went off to the dairy. She returned in a few minutes. Betty had gone into the kitchen. There by the fire sat the old man, mumbling something Betty could not understand.

"I don't think he knows what I mean, Mrs Cuthbert; will you ask him?" said the girl. Mrs Cuthbert bent down, and shrilly questioned him as to whether he had seen Mrs Musgrave go out. He blinked at her, and then raised his hand, and the little switch trembled in the direction of the window. "Saw 'er pass . . . took notice—" he mumbled.

"Which way?" asked Betty.

He only shook his head.

"Ask those people to put up their horse, and wait till Mrs Musgrave comes in," she said. Then she went into her own room, and took a seat by the window, straining her eyes to see her mother's figure on the road.

The sun had set now, and the evening was beginning to get grey. A mist, as usual, had come up from the sea, and began to creep amongst the trees at the head of the steep lane that led down to the house. As she sat there, Betty heard the dog barking outside, then the clatter of the dog-cart being led into the yard, then the men's voices talking with Mrs Cuthbert. After a bit she heard them go out again, and saw them pass up the road, walking slowly, and talking together. Then a great stillness settled over the house; she heard nothing, as she sat in the twilight, except an occasional slight creaking in the old room. Once it sounded so much as if a footstep had crossed the floor that she got up and opened the door, and looked in, thinking, perhaps, that her mother had entered silently. But she saw nothing amongst the shadows, only heard the mice scampering in the walls. "*The spirits walk there*"—she remembered what the old man had said, and thought to herself how faint and small those ghostly terrors were, compared to the reality which she had to face. She sat down again to her watch by the window, scarcely able to see any distance in the gathering darkness. The men had not yet re-

turned. She shivered with cold; but she felt a strange courage at her heart. It was as if the very worst had come, and left her still unshaken. "There is none other that fighteth for me," she repeated to herself again.

CHAPTER XLVII

BETTY sat by the window until the rooks began to come home; as she heard their clamour over the garden, she stepped into the kitchen.

"Mrs Cuthbert, it is beginning to get dark; I must go out and try to find my mother," she said.

Mrs Cuthbert, who was washing her milk pails, set one down with a clatter, and looked up at her. "Wait a bit, miss, she'll come 'ome all right. *They*"—she nodded in the direction of the road up which Mr Smythe had gone—"they won't wait 'ere *all* night; you have patience."

"I can wait no longer; I must go now," said the girl.

She turned to leave the room, when she noticed that the old man was making a sign to her, endeavouring to speak. Betty went close up to him, and asked him what he wanted to say.

He raised his heavy hand, and pointed at the wall with his little switch, mumbling something unintelligible. His wife was about to silence him impatiently, when Betty caught her by the arm.

"I see!" she exclaimed, "the key is gone—the key of the orchard—doesn't it always hang there?"

Before Mrs Cuthbert could reply, she had hurried to the door. The woman followed her as she made her way across the yard, and turned down the narrow lane that led to the orchard.

"The door is open," said Betty, looking back.

The heavy old door in the wall was swinging ajar. Betty pushed it open, and went in. It was nearly dark by this time, and the low trees, leaning this way and that on their twisted stems, cast a depth of shadow upon the long, unkempt grass. The girl put her hands over her eyes, and stared amongst the gloom; she could make out nothing; then she called—a low, clear call that carried far—"Mother! Mother!"

There was no answer. Betty waited for a second or two; a frightened bird chattered suddenly in the tree beside them—then all was still.

"Let us go down to the end," said the girl.

She moved quickly along the narrow path. On each side the grass grew rank, soaked with the evening dews. Betty's skirts were drenched, and showers of raindrops fell upon her face as she pushed the overhanging branches aside. They came at last to the low wall at the foot of the orchard; there a gate led into the fields beyond. Betty tried to open it, in vain.

"This is locked, you see; she cannot have gone through here," she said. Then, just as she was turning away, her eye caught the glimmer of something white upon a bramble by the wall. She lifted the handkerchief, and looked at Mrs

Cuthbert. "She must have climbed over somehow—there, where the stones are loose."

With some difficulty, for the loose stones came rattling down with a touch, she got over the wall, and stood looking around the bare expanse of swelling grassy fields, that lay under the darkening night.

"Let me get a lantern, miss—come back to the house, and get a shawl about you—then we'll go together."

"I will go on," said Betty. "You may go back and get a light. I'll go right across the field, up by the hedge there, that leads to the coast road; if I have not found her then, I shall wait for you by the other gate—go back."

The woman hurried off, and Betty walked out into the fields alone. The soft approaching darkness had almost smothered the whole sky, the ridges of land showed dark in front of her. There were no trees or bushes in the fields—only the hedges intersecting them like black lines upon a sheet of grey. A hare rose at her feet; a flying beetle slapped against her face; the faint, pure wind rushed past her with a sigh; she heard far off the distant trampling of the sea—then away in the distance she saw the last glimmer of the evening light. She went slowly along, looking as far as she could from side to side, stopping every now and then to listen for a sound. At last she gained the ridge of the field, and stood looking all about her. She called again, but there was no answer. The rising ground behind now hid the

lights of the farm, and a sudden agony of loneliness came over her standing there in the breathless dark. The great bare black land, the wide arch of the starless sky, the distant rumble of the sea—and no other human thing beside her. She pressed her hands together, and repeated again—her voice sounding strange to herself in the wide stillness—*"There is none other that fighteth for me."* The next moment she heard a sound, a faint groan from the other side of the hedge. Holding her breath to listen, she took a step forward, and it came again. There was a gap in the hedge a short way farther on. Betty climbed the bank, and pushed her way through, almost slipping as she did so, for the ground was pashed into mud where the cattle had huddled together. On the other side was a steep bank and the narrow, deep lane. She slid and scrambled down, and then she saw a dark heap of something lying just below her on the road. In another moment she was kneeling by her mother's side. She raised the poor head on her arm. Mrs Musgrave groaned again and sighed. Betty could discern nothing of what had happened. She only saw that her mother must have slipped her foot, and fallen violently from the top of the bank. She bent above her, murmuring soft words, and lifting her up as well as she could. Mrs Musgrave did not move or speak, only breathed sharp, heavy breaths, and groaned a little now and then. Betty knelt there in the darkness for minutes as long as hours, until she heard footsteps, and saw a light swinging

in the distance, and raised her voice to call. Mrs Cuthbert came up first, pushing through the hedge. She saw Betty's dark figure crouching in the road. The girl looked up at her with a face that shone in the twilight like a white moon. "I have found her. She is very much hurt," she said. The woman scrambled down, and in a few minutes two of the farm men appeared with a lantern. The sharp, swinging ray fell upon Mrs Musgrave's face as she lay with her head thrown back on Betty's arm. Her bonnet had fallen off; there was a deep wound where her head had struck against the stones. She did not open her eyes, or make any answer when they spoke to her.

They carried her back to the house. But after they had got in, Betty heard the sound of wheels coming into the courtyard. She went to the door, and called to Mrs Cuthbert.

"If those men—have come back—will you tell them what has happened." She heard Mr Smythe's voice raised as if in anger—then heard him asking if he should go and fetch a doctor. Again Betty went to the door, "Tell them to go away," she said. She returned to her mother's side, and in a few minutes heard the dogcart drive off. She saw the lamps flash for an instant as they wheeled round the turn of the road; then all was dark and quiet once more.

Betty sat by her mother through the night. There was no return of consciousness; and the doctor whom Mrs Cuthbert had summoned could do nothing. Once, as the girl hung over her, she

opened her eyes, and seemed to struggle for speech; but the veil would not lift, and Betty could not understand the stammering sounds. Towards morning, as she lay again with closed eyes, she pressed Betty's hand twice—then the heavy breathing ceased.

"Come away, miss, come away now—it's all over now," said Mrs Cuthbert, coming up where the girl sat, still, with averted face.

Betty shook her head. "Go away—leave me for a little longer," she whispered; and the woman went away. Returning in half-an-hour, she found Betty standing by the window gazing out into the foggy morning, where the dawn was sending red shafts above the mists. She turned when Mrs Cuthbert entered, and stood by the bed once more looking down at her mother's face. "The end—the end," she said, as if to herself. She looked down dry-eyed; then, without a kiss or a word of farewell, turned, and let Mrs Cuthbert lead her away. The woman watched her, wondering that she did not weep; but in the sharp sigh that she gave as she left the room there was more bitterness than in any tears.

CHAPTER XLVIII

FOR a week after all was over Betty seemed like one in a dream. Then one day when Mrs Cuthbert came into the room she was startled by the change on the girl's face. "You're cold, miss, and lonely, sittin' 'ere in this damp room; let me make you a fire," she said, coming up to her.

"I am not cold—I am ill, Mrs Cuthbert," said Betty, trying to speak in her usual voice, and ending by covering her face with her trembling hands. "No, no; I do not want a doctor. I only want to go to bed and rest." She allowed the woman to put her to bed, but she would not consent to have a doctor. "What could he do?—he would be only one more person to annoy me," she said.

For days she lay there, sick and shivering, or tossed about burning with fever. The woman did her best in her spare time to nurse her. Ignorant and rough as she was, she could do very little. The food that she brought was coarse and ill-served, and her work obliged her to leave Betty alone for hours at a time. That did not matter, for the girl had no wish for company. By day she lay listening to the sounds about her, as if they were very far away. The poultry that

screamed and cackled in the yard, the horses trampling in the stalls, or on wet days the rain sweeping the window-panes like a ghostly hand. At night how the mice raced up and down behind the wainscoting in the old walls. Betty used to hear them coming quite far away, and listen till they rushed, helter-skelter, all in a flurry, squeaking and scratching, behind the very panelling beside her bed. Funny that they should be racing and exciting themselves so much over nothing. She would wonder, too, how the rooks could waken to clamour so early about their nests. Once, as she lay awake in the grey morning, she heard a cuckoo fly, crying thrice, above the house. In her sick fancies she remembered how they used to mock one another from the hillsides in the bare, echoing glens at home. Could she, she thought, but once more find herself there—to lie on the grass in the sun, as she used to do when she was a little child, to see the charred battlements of the old tower black against the sky—surely it would cure the pain of life, and her soul might depart in peace.

“Will this go on for ever and ever? When shall I begin to forget?” she would think.

She tried not to allow herself to dwell on the last week. Whenever she began to see the whole thing over again too vividly, she would endeavour to think of other things. But that was not always possible, and the horrible imaginings of sickness would often refuse to be banished. Then, perhaps, in the middle of the night she would

waken from a feverish sleep and start up in bed, her heart beating in her throat, staring round and round the dimly-lighted room. Surely she heard a foot—a heavy, dead foot—crossing the long, old room outside her own. What unutterable shape might she not see coming slowly in at that door . . . then she would lie down again, and try to pray, but her poor, broken thoughts would not even make one coherent sentence. Or she would sleep, and dream strange dreams—dream that she was wandering about in London, unable to find her way home, with no money, and not knowing where she was—or she was again at Mrs Trevoise's, and seemed to be running up the dingy stairs, with some dreadful fear urging her on. Then she would waken, and try to keep herself awake, not so much because of the horror of her dream, but being, as Coleridge was, "Afraid of what a dream might be." And there were memories, when she was awake, that came upon her unawares. Once in the night she heard an owl hooting. For a minute she listened, wondering why it hurt her, and then turned wearily on her pillow, trying not to remember Oliver's name.

She got a kind letter from Mr Wentworth, and a little soiled, scrawled note from Mrs Trevoise; but she did not even attempt to reply to them. She lay in a sort of apathy, only knowing day from night by candles or the sun. One afternoon she had fallen into a troubled sleep. Her room had been darkened, for the sun was hot out-

of-doors. When she woke with a start, she became aware that there was somebody sitting beside her.

She started up wildly, leaning on her elbow, her heart beating quickly with inconsequent terror. "Who? what?" she began—and the next moment had flung herself, sobbing with joy, into the arms of Mrs Trevoise.

"Dear! dear! dear! t'ere's a darlin'; don't be cryin', now, to sicken yourself again," she ejaculated, soothing her, and rocking her back and forwards like a baby. She seemed to bring some comfort with her very presence. She coaxed the girl to eat. She sat with her at night. Betty could scarcely believe it true; but she was there, smiling and cheerful as ever, in the morning. Betty began to revive from the hour that she saw her. In a day or two she was able to get up and crawl into the next room.

"T'it's t' *complete* change t'at you need, darlin'," said Mrs Trevoise. "T'ere's a dampness about t' air here (and t' sad associations)," she added, hurriedly. "You must come back with me whenever you're able for t' journey. *All is over*"—the sweeping width with which she made this statement would have "covered a multitude of sins." "*All* is forgotten and forgiven, darlin', and t' *complete* change of scene is necessary now." Betty neither assented nor denied. She just sat listlessly, propped up with a pillow, in a chair by the window, and looked out. Mrs Trevoise, who was knitting, glanced at her face for a moment.

"You're young, dear," she began.

"Oh no, Mrs Trevoſe," ſaid Betty, in a gentle voice; "I am very old now."

"T'it's extraordinary t' changes of t'is mortal life," aſſented Mrs Trevoſe. Then, ſkimming over a painful ſubject, ſhe inquired: "T'ere was a gentleman, dear, t'at came to inquire for your addreſs not ſo long ago. He ſaid t'at he would write to you, and I forwarded t' letter?"

"Yes; I got it," ſaid Betty.

"T' ways of Providence are inſcrutable," continued Mrs Trevoſe. "T' affliction's t' portion of us all; but t'ere's bright days——"

Betty ſmiled faintly as ſhe looked at her, and ſomething in that ſmile made Mrs Trevoſe cough, and glide off the ſubject, with tears in her eyes.

"*Hung and quartered*," ſhe murmured to herſelf a little later, when Betty had gone to bed, remembering that ſmile. "Hung and quartered—and it would be too good for him. T'it's I t'at would like to give him a taſte of t' truth about his behaviour."

She never again alluded to "brighter days" to Betty. She would amuſe her with a conſtant flow of cheerful, varied converſation, noticing keenly whenever a momentary ſparkle came back into the girl's face, or when ſhe took any intereſt in the ſubject that they talked of. As ſhe grew ſtronger, Mrs Trevoſe began to hint about going back to London; but the girl would not liſten. "I'd rather ſtay here," ſhe ſaid; "I

don't want to go back amongst other people any more."

"T' house is almost empty at present," said Mrs Trevese, giving a keen glance at Betty's face. "Mrs Levison and her son, t'ey're gone to Amsterdam at present. Madam, she's out nearly all day — leavin' Bébé too much alone. T'would be t' greatest kindness in you to look after her. Drake,"—here she counted her stitches—"he's been in Germany for some time past. I doubt we won't see much of him." Betty said nothing. "T'ere's an old lady — a charmin' person indeed, but afflicted with t' *slight* facial paralysis, t'at just unfits her for *general* society—and two young ones t'at's studying music." Betty drew a long breath.

"Well, Mrs Trevese, you are very kind to me ; but I cannot let you stay away from your house any longer. You must go now and leave me."

"Such changes !" remarked Mrs Trevese, ignoring Betty's speech. "Madam's makin' such an excellent salary now t'at Mrs Jarvis is thinkin' of sendin' t' child to school. Mr Drake, dear, is goin' to Brazil again—t' *long* farewell—but perhaps he'll be back in a year or two."

"Most likely," said Betty.

Mrs Trevese said no more to her that night. The next day, however, she introduced a new subject. Mrs Jarvis, she said, had asked her to see if Betty would undertake to act as governess to the little girl, at a small salary—living with Mrs Trevese. The good woman laughed

when Betty said that she did not know enough to teach anyone. "Dear! dear! *t' general tone of t' instruction* will be of *t' highest* quality. T' little technicalities are of *no* importance."

Just then Betty felt unequal to any exertion; but she was fond of children. This was her only chance at present of making her living, and Bébé's unfortunate circumstances called out all her pity. She gave her consent to coming back to town along with Mrs Trevoise, and said that she would try her best to teach the child.

In a few days, accordingly, they left Redmyre. As they drove up the long hill past the church Mrs Trevoise adroitly slipped into the opposite seat. Though her substantial person shut out almost all the view, and her kindly talk flowed on uninterruptedly, still, she saw Betty's look as they passed by the corner of the churchyard wall.

It was late at night before they reached home. Mrs Trevoise was all kindness. She had had a room prepared for the girl next to her own. She was untiring in her little attentions. Betty tried to show her gratitude by some appearance of cheerfulness; but the good woman's heart ached, as she noticed the way that her step dragged when she had bidden her good-night, and crept off to bed.

CHAPTER XLIX

"DEAR me! dear me! I must have made some mistake," said Mr Wentworth to himself, standing at Mrs Treves's door. He re-read the address that he had brought with him, and when the maid-servant appeared he eyed her with caution over his spectacles, inquiring, "Does a young lady—Miss Musgrave—live here?" as if he doubted the response.

"Walk in, sir. Miss Musgrave 'll be down immediately," was the answer, and the visitor was ushered into the drawing-room.

"Dear me! dear me! I had no idea that things were as bad as this," he murmured, looking about him. When Betty came in, he at first could say nothing, only hold her hand, and look at her, gulping down his astonishment and distress.

She sat down facing him, where the light struck full on her face. Her dress was black, and very much worn. He had not seen her for a year and more, but never could he have imagined that so short a time could have made such havoc with her beauty. He took off his spectacles and rubbed them to make sure that he saw aright. Was this sallow, thin woman, with great hollow eyes, the girl that he remembered. Betty saw his confusion, but did not guess its cause.

"It was very good of you to come and see me," she said—her voice was low, and she spoke without a smile.

"I have never been in town since . . . or I should have come long ago. You are well, my dear?"

"Yes, thank you; I am quite well, now," said Betty.

"Have you got sufficient means—excuse my asking such a question, but you will forgive an old man—to make you comfortable—all that you want?" he asked, again looking round him with distress.

Betty explained to him that she had got the charge of a little girl. "It gives me something to do—I am the better of it."

"Yes, quite true," he assented; adding, "but the surroundings seem scarcely what you have been accustomed to."

"I don't mind that—now," said the girl.

The old man watched her as she spoke with downcast eyes. He was beginning to recover his first shock of surprise, and to trace the likeness to the girl as she had been before. "Oh! Oliver," he thought, as he looked at her. "I am sure you deserve to be punished; but I would not wish you to see this."

He had come, however, with a purpose, and could not waste his words. When he had talked for a little to the girl about her affairs, he said to her, "And have you quite forgotten us all at St Julliot's?"

"Dear Mr Wentworth, I can never forget you."

"When are you coming back, Betty? Come and stay with me as long as you like, my dear. It will be the greatest kindness. I will do all that I can to make you happy. Will you come?"

"You are very kind—but I do not think that I can," she answered, without looking up.

"I am lonely now. I seldom see any young people——" he paused. "Oliver Lacy is not at home."

Betty was silent.

"He has had . . . an unfortunate quarrel with his mother," the rector went on, always glancing at the girl to see how far he might go. "Mrs Lacy is, as you know, an admirable woman, but not a pleasant one to quarrel with."

"Who is?" said Betty.

"Ah, well, my dear; some of us can forgive—some people can even forget—as well."

Betty continued to look down at her thin hands on her lap without speaking.

"Well, well; Oliver is away from home, as I said, so you would have no young society; but the country will do you good." He paused again. "You have had a great shock, Betty; but remember that you are young—Life and Love."

Betty leant her chin on her hand, and raised her eyes, looking at him with a long, clear look.

"Love! What have I to do with love," she repeated. "I am done with all that."

"My dear child, you are only beginning your life."

She sat looking at him, still with the same unmoved face. The rector bent forward, speaking low in his earnestness. "Betty—Oliver loves you very truly."

He saw that she met his gaze without hesitation. Her eyes were as clear as a stream that shows the pebbles in its bed—there seemed to be nothing further to read there.

"You remember at St Julliets—how you and he——" Mr Wentworth continued.

"It is so long ago. I have forgotten," said the girl.

"But you cared for him once, Betty?" said the old man, gently.

"I—think so," Betty answered; again repeating "but I have forgotten."

"But, my dear, you're young; you must have courage. Life is still before you."

"Oh *no*," said Betty. "All that is over—long ago." She rubbed her hand across her eyes as if in weariness. "Don't try to bring me back to it. I would rather stay where I am . . . I am quite contented now; I have the child to look after."

"But if you saw him," began the rector.

Betty smiled. "I don't mind seeing him."

"You would pity him, Betty, if you knew what he has suffered. Oliver takes things very hard."

"I am sorry that he does."

"You would forgive him?" Betty said nothing. The old man rose to go. "You would forgive him?"

"Oh yes; I have forgiven him long ago."

"Cold comfort that," said Mr Wentworth, with his old shrewd smile.

Betty would not promise to come to St Julliets. She said that perhaps—later on—in spring she might come for a little while; and he had to be satisfied with that assurance. She asked him before he left, "Is Mr Lacy never at home now?"

"No; you would not see him. You would see very little of Mrs Lacy either, I imagine," he added.

After Mr Wentworth had gone Betty sat still for some time. The room seemed suddenly to have become more deplorable. She saw anew all the dreariness of her surroundings. "Am I beginning to feel again?" she asked herself in a sort of dismay.

Mrs Trevoise looked in, and found her sitting there. "Dear! dear!" she exclaimed. "Here you are alone, and t'ere's someone in my parlour t'at's anxious to see you."

Betty rose, and turned quickly, with some of her old colour coming back to her face.

"It's Mr Drake, I know. I want to see him before he goes away. Has he come to say good-bye?"

"You go into t' parlour, darlin'; I'll be along in a *second*," she replied. The emphasis on the word suggested the merest moment; but Betty had time to shake hands with Drake, and stand still in a moment's embarrassment, and Mrs

Trevose had not reappeared. Betty did not quite know what to say. Béb  stood on the rug, tearful, having heard of Drake's departure, but smiling too, over a new toy that he had brought to her. He began to speak rather awkwardly about his going away—his voyage, and so on. He had looked at Betty when she first came in, and caught his breath, muttering something to himself.

A few minutes passed, and still Mrs Trevose did not return. "Well," said Drake, cheerfully, "there is nothing, I suppose, that I can do for you; I must go." He held out his hand. "I may not see you for a long time—there are all kinds of chances out there"—he saw Betty's eyelids tremble, and hurried on—"but you'll think of me sometimes, Miss Musgrave. I'm very grateful to you."

"You—to me?" said Betty.

"Yes, yes, of course; you don't understand. I can't explain—that sort of thing is not in my line—but I meant what I said."

Betty looked up at him. "I borrowed some money from you," she began—then suddenly faltered and stopped. His face had grown very red.

"A woman! A woman! You're all alike!" he said, speaking as if the very words were bitter.

"Oh! I didn't mean to hurt you—forgive me. I meant only that——"

"That you wanted to pay it back."

"Yes ; I did," Betty answered, for her courage had risen again. "I have got it now. You'll take it, won't you?"

He looked into her face—brave and pale—and broke out into a rough laugh. "Very well, then. Come away ; pay it back to me, and I'll take it."

Betty ran upstairs to her own room. She took out the money which she had scraped together for months past, and saved from the sum that had been paid to her for teaching Bébé. It was all ready, and had been lying there in her desk for weeks. She came back again immediately, very pale, and trembling a little, with the envelope in her hand.

Drake was standing by the fireplace, just where she had left him.

"Here it is," said Betty, adding breathlessly, "and thank you very much."

He took it from her, opened the envelope, and slowly counted the notes out one by one.

"That's all right," he said. Then he put them all together, tore them in two, and thrust them into the fire ; turned to Betty, looked at her long and hard—kissed her. "I'm paid," he said ; and went away.

When Mrs Trevoise returned, Betty was poking something into the fire. Her eyelashes were cast down, and in a voice that trembled a good deal she told her that Mr Drake was gone.

CHAPTER L

IT was June of the following year—a hot June, when London burned.

Betty had been out with Bébé in the Park, and when she came in had put her to bed, for the child was sick with the heat. She herself felt as if she had drawn dust instead of air into her lungs, and she was glad to get back to the dark, noisy house.

It had been a busy year for Mrs Trevoise. Now the most of the inmates had gone. When Betty came into the drawing-room it was empty. She sat down by the open window, that looked out upon the back garden. The fowls were arranged in a despondent group in the scrap of shadow afforded by the corner of the hen-house; the meagre grass in the little plot of ground was scorched to the roots, and the dull murmur of London sounded through the heavy air.

In the room every piece of furniture was covered with a thin layer of dust. The blinds (Venetian blinds with broken slats) were pulled down, and on a side table stood the only other sign of summer—a vase of lilies, now a fortnight old, and smelling badly.

Betty leaned back in her chair with her eyes shut. She began to think about the country.

How thick the shade was there in June. How in the North the long, long evening breathed itself out imperceptibly just before the dawn. Could she not fall asleep now, and dream again that she was there—feel the pure wind upon her face, and see the green places where she played as a child. The sound of a piano began in the next house, and an odour of cookery came creeping into the room. It was still early in the afternoon, but there was always something in the frying-pan at Mrs Trevoise's. She could not fall asleep after all. The dream came not; instead she opened her eyes and looked about the room, thinking that when she had rested for a little she would get up and dust it. She and Mrs Trevoise continued to differ on minor points of that sort. "T' *general* impression of homelike comfort is t' great t'ing, dear," Mrs Trevoise would exclaim; and Betty would laugh, and dust as much as she pleased.

As she sat thinking, she heard the door-bell tinkle. "It will be Mrs Levison coming back," she said to herself, and did not move until the maid's shrill voice behind her announced, "Mr Lacy."

Betty sprang up. Had she been dreaming, after all. Oliver came into the room, and they looked at one another for a moment without speaking.

He seemed, she thought, much older and taller, and the expression of his face was changed. Oliver saw nothing but her startled blue eyes.

"I have not seen you for a long time," said

Betty, shaking hands with him. She had recovered her composure now, and her face was not even flushed.

"I have been away from home. I have not dared to come to see you before," Oliver answered.

"Oh!" said Betty.

"Will you allow me to speak to you now?" he asked.

Betty sat with her hands crossed, looking down with an impassive face. "Oh yes," she replied, in a light, cold voice.

"You are still living here?" said Oliver.

"Yes. It is very hot in town just now," she said.

Was it? he wondered: all the rivers of spring called to him in her voice. He looked about the room blankly, the very four walls of it seemed to have melted away; he was not conscious of anything in it—he saw nothing but Betty there before him.

A thousand vows of love, a thousand assurances and prayers had been in his heart. He had said to himself, that, first of all, most humbly, he would ask her to forgive him. But, as he looked at her, the words died unspoken on his lips.

"You have come from St Julliot's to-day, I suppose," Betty went on, speaking as she would have done to any ordinary stranger.

"No; I have not been living with my mother for some time—I have been working—" Here Betty smiled. Oliver went on quickly, "I have been working for a living for a year past. I

went as agent to one of my uncles—I give satisfaction, I believe.” Betty smiled again: the smile was not encouraging.

“I did not find it easy—at first.”

“It is not easy to work for one’s living,” said Betty.

“However,” he went on, “my mother seems to dislike this arrangement. She wants me to give it up. She thinks that one must suffer much hardship on three hundred a year.” Again he paused—then with great sweetness in his voice he said, “Betty, could you live on that—it is all that I have to offer you—now.”

“Though you had everything in the world to offer to me, Mr Lacy, it wouldn’t make any difference—now,” she answered, echoing his word.

“Betty, I cannot endure to see you here—alone—unhappy.”

Betty looked up at him, and he saw for the first time how her face had faded; he saw, too, that it was different. She seemed, as she sat there, to look across at him from another world, high and far away—her eyes were like stars upon a frosty night.

“I am not unhappy—now—I am quite contented—I have work . . . *and a Friend*,” she said. She let her eyes fall again, and went on in the same even voice.

“Besides, why should you wish to marry me—*now*, Mr Lacy? When I was—when I had some beauty, perhaps, it was different, but even then

you forgot me. You saw the disgrace that I suffered from." Her voice trembled for a moment, for she heard Oliver draw his breath. "I have been . . . through blacker depths since then. Now all that is over—all that I want is to forget—my world is here—with people that you know nothing of—they are my friends now. I love them; and all that I want is to forget," she added, after a moment. "You made a mistake; you never loved me. You don't know anything about love."

Oliver pushed away his chair, and rose to his feet. "No," he said; "you're right. I have made a mistake. I did not know anything about love." He stood looking down at Betty. "I thought that love endured—that it could forgive. When I was a child I used to be told, '*While he was yet a great way off*——' but I was mistaken, I see. Good-bye."

Betty held out a cold hand to him, and he went out of the room.

The narrow hall was almost dark; no one stirred in the house. He muttered to himself, "Well, it's the end! I was a fool—a cursed fool—to come at all," as he made his way along the passage, tripping again over the torn mat.

Just then he heard a door open, and someone came running after him. He looked round to see Betty. "Have I forgotten something? What is it?" he asked.

"No," she said; "but I—I—I——"

For a moment Oliver stood unbelieving; but as

a child holds out its arms to its mother, so Betty moved towards him (ah, love! that triumphs to the end!), and all the troubles that had been between them were forgotten then.

There is a brass tablet in the wall of the church at St Julliets. Oliver and his wife stood together to read again the words upon it. The dim light—it was evening—fell on Betty's face. As he saw it, Oliver said suddenly, "You told me once that nothing could ever make you happy: you are happy now? Tell me—say it—Betty."

"I am happy now," she repeated slowly; then added, "but I was happy—before you came."

"In London?"

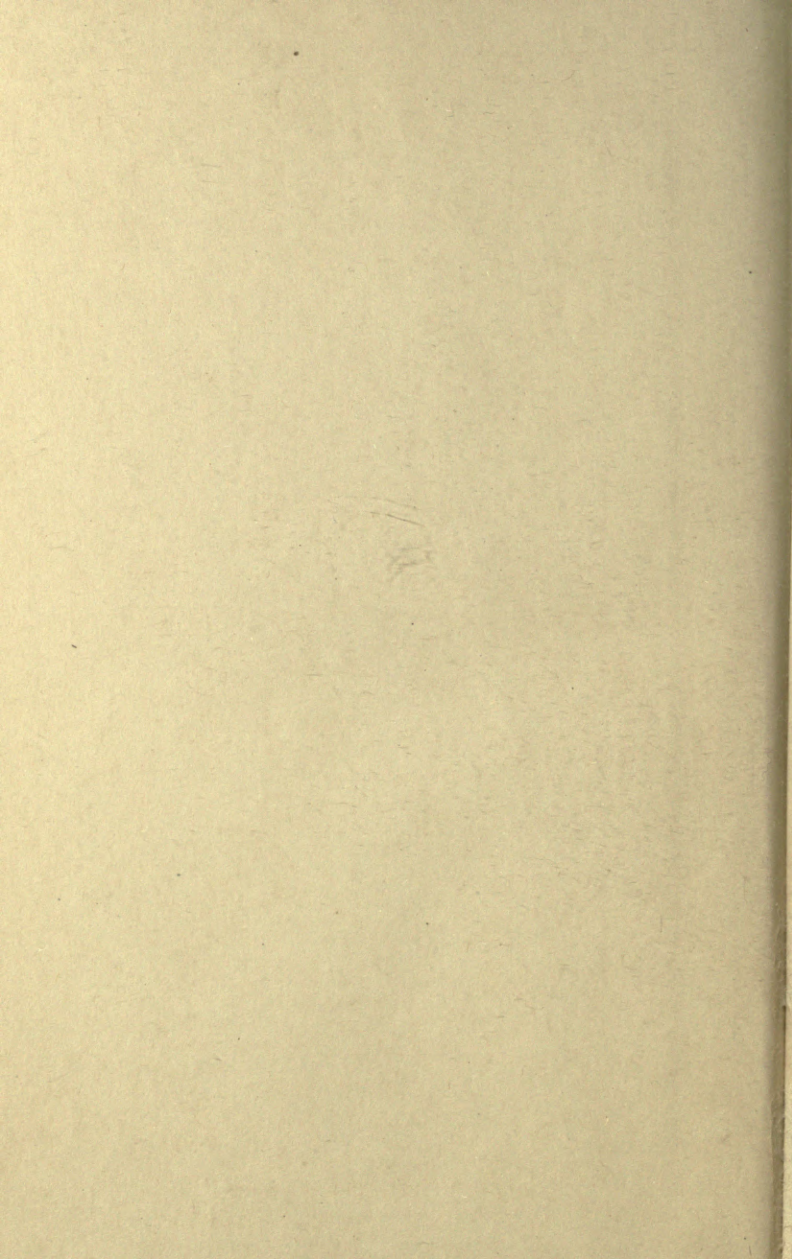
"Yes."

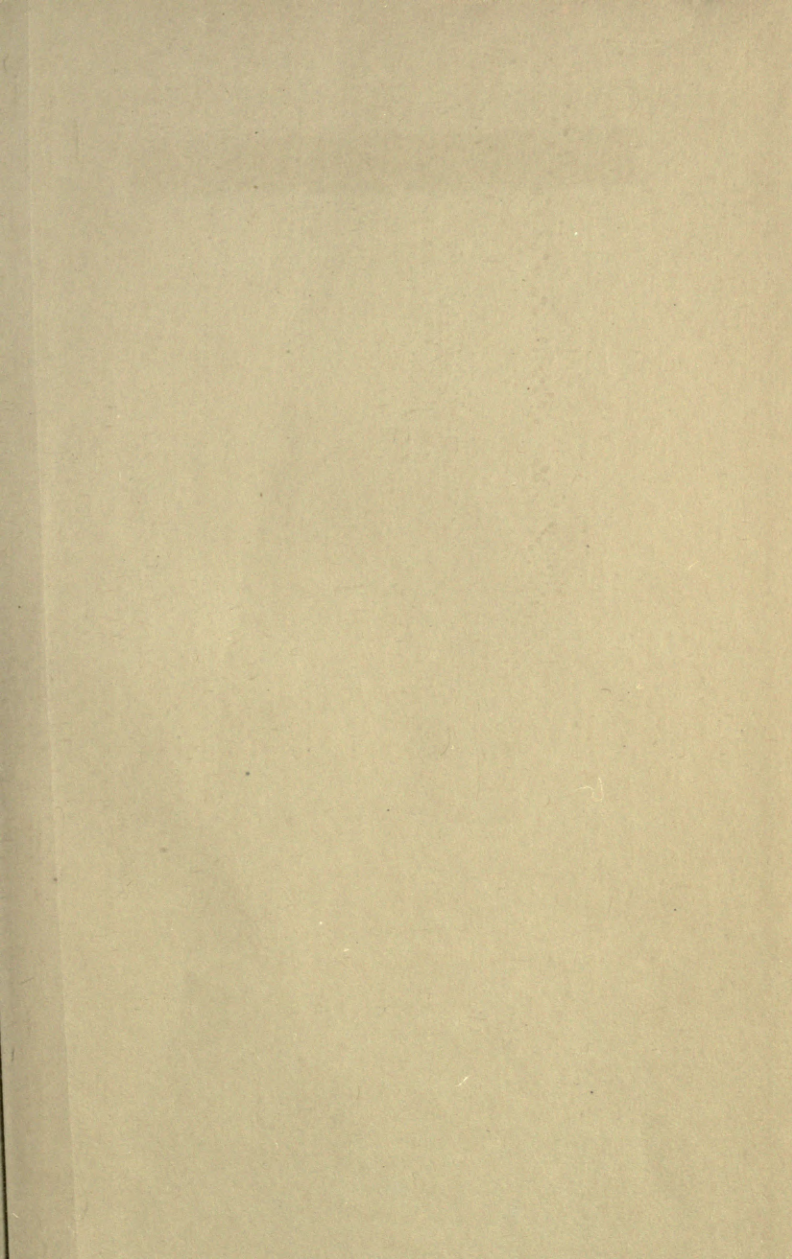
"What do you mean? I don't understand."

But Betty did not answer. She bent her head, and they read in silence the words that were written on the brass.

"In memory of Charlotte Wentworth. . . . very gentle; greatly beloved: she lived in this parish for forty years, and died in Hope—expecting the morning of God."

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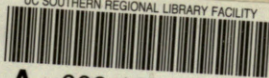
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